

Modern Buddhism

The Path of
Compassion
and Wisdom



Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

Volume 1 Sutra
Second Edition

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Compassion
and Wisdom



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Also by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

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GESHE KELSANG GYATSO

Modern Buddhism

THE PATH OF COMPASSION
AND WISDOM

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Contents

Illustrations

Preface

Preliminary Explanation

What is Buddhism?

Buddhist Faith

What is the Mind?

Who are the Kadampas?

The Preciousness of Kadam Lamrim

The Path of a Person of Initial Scope

The Preciousness of our Human Life

What Does our Death Mean?

The Dangers of Lower Rebirth

Going for Refuge

What is Karma?

The Path of a Person of Middling Scope

What We Should Know

What We Should Abandon

What We Should Practise

What We Should Attain

The Path of a Person of Great Scope

The Supreme Good Heart - Bodhichitta

Training in Affectionate Love

Training in Cherishing Love

Training in Wishing Love

Training in Universal Compassion

Training in Actual Bodhichitta

Training in the Path of Bodhichitta

Training in the Six Perfections

Training in Taking in Conjunction with the Practice of the Six Perfections

Training in Giving in Conjunction with the Practice of the Six Perfections

Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta

What is Emptiness?
The Emptiness of our Body
The Emptiness of our Mind
The Emptiness of our I
The Emptiness which is Empty of Eight Extremes
Conventional and Ultimate Truths
The Union of the Two Truths
The Practice of Emptiness in our Daily Activities
A Simple Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta
Examination of our Lamrim Practice

Illustrations

Buddha Shakyamuni
Atisha
Je Tsongkhapa
Buddha of Compassion
Arya Tara
The nada

Preface

The instructions given in this book are scientific methods for improving our human nature and qualities through developing the capacity of our mind. In recent years our knowledge of modern technology has increased considerably, and as a result we have witnessed remarkable material progress, but there has not been a corresponding increase in human happiness. There is no less suffering in the world today, and there are no fewer problems. Indeed, it might be said that there are now more problems and greater dangers than ever before. This shows that the cause of happiness and the solution to our problems do not lie in knowledge of material things. Happiness and suffering are states of mind and so their main causes are not to be found outside the mind. If we want to be truly happy and free from suffering, we must learn how to control our mind.

When things go wrong in our life and we encounter difficult situations, we tend to regard the situation itself as our problem, but in reality whatever problems we experience come from the side of the mind. If we were to respond to difficult situations with a positive or peaceful mind they would not be problems for us; indeed, we may even come to regard them as challenges or opportunities for growth and development. Problems arise only if we respond to difficulties with a negative state of mind. Therefore, if we want to be free from problems, we must transform our mind.

Buddha taught that the mind has the power to create all pleasant and unpleasant objects. The world is the result of the karma, or actions, of the beings who inhabit it. A pure world is the result of pure actions and an impure world is the result of impure actions. Since all actions are created by mind, ultimately everything, including the world itself, is created by mind. There is no creator other than the mind.

Normally we say 'I created such and such', or 'He or she created such and such', but the actual creator of everything is the mind because everything is a mere imputation by mind. This is clearly explained in detail in the chapter *Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta*. We are like servants of our mind; whenever it wants to do something, we have to do it without any choice. Since beginningless time until now we have been under the control of our mind, without any freedom; but if we sincerely practise the instructions given

in this book we can reverse this situation and gain control over our mind. Only then shall we have real freedom.

Through studying many Buddhist texts we may become a renowned scholar; but if we do not put Buddha's teachings into practice, our understanding of Buddhism will remain hollow, with no power to solve our own or others' problems. Expecting intellectual understanding of Buddhist texts alone to solve our problems is like a sick person hoping to cure his or her illness through merely reading medical instructions without actually taking the medicine. As Buddhist Master Shantideva says:

We need to put Buddha's teachings, the Dharma, into practice
Because nothing can be accomplished just by reading words.
A sick man will never be cured of his illness
Through merely reading medical instructions!

Each and every living being has the sincere wish to avoid all suffering and problems permanently. Normally we try to do this by using external methods, but no matter how successful we are from a worldly point of view – no matter how materially wealthy, powerful or highly respected we become – we shall never find permanent liberation from suffering and problems. In reality, all the problems we experience day to day come from our self-cherishing and self-grasping – misconceptions that exaggerate our own importance. However, because we do not understand this, we usually blame others for our problems, and this just makes them worse. From these two basic misconceptions arise all our other delusions, such as anger and attachment, causing us to experience endless problems.

I pray that everyone who reads this book may experience deep inner peace, or peace of mind, and accomplish the real meaning of human life. I particularly would like to encourage everyone to read specifically the chapter *Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta*. Through carefully reading and contemplating this chapter again and again with a positive mind, you will gain very profound knowledge, or wisdom, which will bring great meaning to your life.

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso

VOLUME 1 OF 3

Sutra





Buddha Shakyamuni

Preliminary Explanation

WHAT IS BUDDHISM?

Buddhism is the practice of Buddha's teachings, also called 'Dharma', which means 'protection'. By practising Buddha's teachings, living beings are permanently protected from suffering. The founder of Buddhism is Buddha Shakyamuni, who showed the manner of accomplishing the ultimate goal of living beings, the attainment of enlightenment, at Bodh Gaya in India in 589 BC. At the request of the gods Indra and Brahma, Buddha then began to expound his profound teachings, or 'turned the Wheel of Dharma'. Buddha gave eighty-four thousand teachings, and from these precious teachings Buddhism developed in this world.

Today we can see many different forms of Buddhism, such as Zen and Theravada Buddhism. All these different aspects are practices of Buddha's teachings, and all are equally precious; they are just different presentations. In this book I shall explain about Buddhism according to the Kadampa tradition, which I have studied and practised. This explanation is not given for the purpose of intellectual understanding, but for gaining profound realizations through which we can solve our daily problems of delusions and accomplish the real meaning of our human life.

There are two stages to the practice of Buddha's teachings – the practices of Sutra and Tantra – both of which are explained in this book. Although the instructions presented here come from Buddha Shakyamuni, and Buddhist Masters such as Atisha, Je Tsongkhapa and our present Teachers, this book is called *Modern Buddhism* because its presentation of Dharma is designed especially for the people of the modern world. My intention in writing this book is to give the reader strong encouragement to develop and maintain compassion and wisdom. If everyone sincerely practises the path of compassion and wisdom all their problems will be solved and never arise again; I guarantee this.

We need to practise Buddha's teachings because there is no other real method to solve human problems. For example, because modern technology often causes more suffering and dangers, it cannot be a real method to solve

human problems. Although we want to be happy all the time we do not know how to do this, and we are always destroying our own happiness by developing anger, negative views and negative intentions. We are always trying to escape from problems, even in our dreams, but we do not know how to liberate ourselves from suffering and problems. Because we do not understand the real nature of things, we are always creating our own suffering and problems by performing inappropriate or non-virtuous actions.

The source of all our daily problems and suffering is our uncontrolled desire, also known as 'attachment'. Since beginningless time, because we have had uncontrolled desire for the fulfilment of our own wishes, we have performed various kinds of non-virtuous actions – actions that harm others. As a result, we continually experience various kinds of suffering and miserable conditions in life after life without end. When our wishes are not fulfilled we usually experience unpleasant feelings, such as unhappiness or depression; this is our own problem because we are so attached to the fulfilment of our wishes. When we lose a close friend we experience pain and unhappiness, but this is only because we have no ability to control our desire. When we lose our possessions and the things that we like, we experience unhappiness and we become upset and angry. This is because we have uncontrolled desire for these things. If we were able to control our desire there would be no basis to experience these problems. Many people are engaged in fighting, criminal actions and even warfare; all these actions arise from their uncontrolled desire for the fulfilment of their own wishes. In this way, we can see that there is not a single problem experienced by living beings that does not come from their uncontrolled desire. This proves that unless we control our desire our problems will never cease. Therefore, anyone – whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist – who does not wish to experience problems and suffering should learn to control their desire through training in the particular meditations that are presented in Buddha's teachings.

We should understand that our problems do not exist outside of ourselves, but are part of our mind that experiences unpleasant feelings. When our computer, for example, has a problem we usually say 'I have a problem', but in reality it is the computer's problem and not our problem. The computer's problem is an outer problem, and our problem, which is our own unpleasant feeling, is an inner problem. These two problems are completely different. We need to solve the computer's problem by repairing it, and we need to

solve our own problem by controlling our desire for the computer's problem to be solved. Even if we keep solving the computer's problems, if we are unable to control our desire for the computer we shall continually experience new problems related to the computer. It is the same with our house, our money, our relationships and so forth. Because of mistakenly believing that outer problems are their own problems, most people seek ultimate refuge in the wrong objects. As a result, their suffering and problems never end.

For as long as we are unable to control our delusions such as our uncontrolled desire, we shall have to experience suffering and problems continually, throughout this life and in life after life without end. Because we are bound tightly by the rope of uncontrolled desire to the enjoyments of samsara, the cycle of impure life, it is impossible for us to be free from suffering and problems unless we practise Buddha's teachings, Dharma. Understanding this, we should develop and maintain the strong wish to abandon the root of suffering – uncontrolled desire. This wish is called 'renunciation', and arises from our wisdom.

Buddha's teachings are scientific methods to solve the problems of all living beings permanently. By putting his teachings into practice we shall be able to control our desire and because of this we shall be permanently free from all our suffering and problems. From this alone we can understand how precious and important his teachings, the Dharma, are for everyone. As mentioned above, because all our problems come from uncontrolled desire, and there is no method to control our desire other than Dharma, Buddha's teachings, it is clear that only Dharma is the actual method to solve our daily problems.

By practising Buddha's teachings on the profound view of emptiness, which are presented in the chapter *Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta*, we can permanently solve our daily problems that arise from attachment, anger and the ignorance of self-grasping.

The root of uncontrolled desire and of all our suffering is self-grasping ignorance, ignorance about the way things actually exist. Without relying upon Buddha's teachings we cannot recognize this ignorance; and without practising Buddha's teachings on emptiness we cannot abandon it. Thus we shall have no opportunity to attain liberation from suffering and problems. Through this explanation we can understand that, since all living beings, whether human or non-human, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, wish to be free from suffering and problems, they all need to practise Dharma. There is no

other method to accomplish this aim.

BUDDHIST FAITH

For Buddhists, faith in Buddha Shakyamuni is their spiritual life; it is the root of all Dharma realizations. If we have deep faith in Buddha we shall naturally develop the strong wish to practise his teachings. With this wish we shall definitely apply effort in our Dharma practice, and with strong effort we shall accomplish permanent liberation from the suffering of this life and countless future lives.

The attainment of permanent liberation from suffering depends upon effort in our Dharma practice, which depends upon the strong wish to practise Dharma, which in turn depends upon deep faith in Buddha. Therefore we can understand that if we truly want to experience great benefit from our practice of Buddhism we need to develop and maintain deep faith in Buddha.

How do we develop and maintain this faith? First, we should know why we need to attain permanent liberation from suffering. It is not enough just to experience temporary liberation from a particular suffering; all living beings, including animals, experience temporary liberation from particular sufferings. Animals experience temporary liberation from human suffering, and humans experience temporary liberation from animal suffering. At the moment we may be free from physical suffering and mental pain, but this is only temporary. Later in this life and in our countless future lives we shall have to experience unbearable physical suffering and mental pain, again and again without end. In the cycle of impure life, samsara, no one has permanent liberation; everyone has to experience continually the sufferings of sickness, ageing, death and uncontrolled rebirth, in life after life without end.

Within this cycle of impure life there are various realms or impure worlds into which we can be reborn: the three lower realms – the animal, hungry ghost and hell realms – and the three higher realms – the god, demi-god and human realms. Of all impure worlds, hell is the worst; it is the world that appears to the very worst kind of mind. The world of an animal is less impure, and the world that appears to human beings is less impure than the world that appears to animals. However, there is suffering within every realm. When we take rebirth as a human being we have to experience human suffering, when we take rebirth as an animal we have to experience animal

suffering, and when we take rebirth as a hell being we have to experience the suffering of a hell being. Through contemplating this we shall realize that just experiencing a temporary liberation from particular sufferings is not good enough; we definitely need to attain permanent liberation from the sufferings of this life and all our countless future lives.

How can we accomplish this? Only by putting Buddha's teachings into practice. This is because only Buddha's teachings are the actual methods to abandon our self-grasping ignorance, the source of all our suffering. In his teaching called *King of Concentration Sutra* Buddha says:

A magician creates various things
Such as horses, elephants and so forth.
His creations do not actually exist;
You should know all things in the same way.

This teaching alone has the power to liberate all living beings permanently from their suffering. Through practising and realizing this teaching, which is explained more fully in the chapter *Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta*, we can permanently eradicate the root of all our suffering, our self-grasping ignorance. When this happens we shall experience the supreme permanent peace of mind, known as 'nirvana', permanent liberation from suffering, which is our deepest wish and the real meaning of human life. This is the main purpose of Buddha's teachings.

Through understanding this we shall deeply appreciate the great kindness of Buddha to all living beings in giving profound methods to achieve permanent freedom from the cycle of suffering of sickness, ageing, death and rebirth. Even our mother does not have the compassion that wishes to liberate us from these sufferings; only Buddha has this compassion for all living beings without exception. Buddha is actually liberating us by revealing the wisdom path that leads us to the ultimate goal of human life. We should contemplate this point again and again until we develop deep faith in Buddha. This faith is the object of our meditation; we should transform our mind into faith in Buddha and maintain it single-pointedly for as long as possible. By continually practising this contemplation and meditation we shall maintain deep faith in Buddha day and night, throughout our life.

One of Buddha's main functions is to bestow mental peace upon each and every living being by giving blessings. By themselves living beings are

unable to cultivate a peaceful mind; it is only through receiving Buddha's blessings upon their mental continuum that living beings, including even animals, can experience peace of mind. When their minds are peaceful and calm they are really happy; but if their minds are not peaceful they are not happy, even if their external conditions are perfect. This proves that happiness depends upon mental peace, and since this depends upon receiving Buddha's blessings, Buddha is therefore the source of all happiness. Understanding and contemplating this we should develop and maintain deep faith in Buddha, and generate the strong wish to practise his teachings in general and Kadam Lamrim in particular.

WHAT IS THE MIND?

Although we often talk about our mind, if someone were to ask us, 'What is the mind?', we would have no clear answer. Some people say that our brain is the mind, but this is incorrect. The brain cannot be the mind because it is simply a part of the body; we can see it directly with our eyes and it can even be photographed. On the other hand, the mind is not a part of the body; we cannot see it with our eyes and it cannot be photographed. Therefore it is clear that the brain is not the mind. We can find a clear answer to the question, 'What is the mind?' only from Buddha's teachings.

Buddha gave clear and detailed explanations about the mind as follows. The mind is something whose nature is empty like space, which has never possessed form, shape or colour, and whose function is to perceive and understand objects. There are three different levels of mind: gross, subtle and very subtle. During our dreams, we have dream awareness through which the various kinds of dream things appear to us; this awareness is a subtle mind because it is difficult to recognize. During deep sleep we have only one mental awareness, which perceives emptiness alone. This awareness is called the 'clear light of sleep', and is the very subtle mind because it is extremely difficult to recognize.

During the waking day we have waking awareness through which various kinds of waking things appear to us. This awareness is a gross mind because it is not difficult to recognize. When we fall asleep our gross mind, or waking awareness, dissolves into our subtle mind of sleep. At the same time, all our appearances of the waking world become non-existent; and when we

experience deep sleep, our subtle mind of sleep dissolves into our very subtle mind of sleep, the clear light of sleep. At this stage, we have become like a person who has died. Then, because of our maintaining a karmic connection with this life, from our clear light of sleep our gross mind, or waking awareness, will arise again and various kinds of waking things appear to us again.

The process of sleeping is very similar to the process of dying. The difference between these two is that when we are dying our gross and subtle minds will dissolve into our very subtle mind of death, known as the 'clear light of death'. Then, because of our karmic connection with this life ceasing, our very subtle mind leaves this body, goes to the next life and enters a new body, and then all the various kinds of things of the next life will appear to us. Everything will be completely new.

From this explanation about the mind we can understand clearly the existence of our future lives, so that we can prepare now for the happiness and freedom of our countless future lives through practising Buddha's teachings, Dharma. There is no greater meaning than this. Our present life is only one single life but our futures lives are countless. Therefore, there is no doubt that future lives are more important than this life.

WHO ARE THE KADAMPAS?

'Ka' refers to Buddha's teachings and 'dam' refers to Atisha's instructions on Lamrim (the *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, also known as *Kadam Lamrim*). 'Kadam' therefore refers to the union of Buddha's teachings and Atisha's instructions, and sincere practitioners of Kadam Lamrim are called 'Kadampas'. There are two Kadampa traditions, the ancient and the new. Practitioners of the ancient Kadampa tradition appeared to emphasize the practice of Kadam Lamrim of Sutra more than the practice of Tantra. Later, Je Tsongkhapa and his disciples emphasized the practice of Kadam Lamrim of both Sutra and Tantra equally. This new tradition founded by Je Tsongkhapa is called the new Kadampa tradition.

Kadampas sincerely rely upon Buddha Shakyamuni because Buddha is the source of Kadam Lamrim; they sincerely rely upon Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, and upon the Wisdom Dharma Protector, indicating that their main practice is compassion and wisdom; and they sincerely rely

upon Arya Tara because she promised Atisha that she would take special care of Kadampa practitioners in the future. For this reason, these four enlightened holy beings are called the 'Four Kadampa Guru Deities'.

The founder of the Kadampa tradition is the great Buddhist Master and scholar, Atisha. Atisha was born in AD 982 as a prince in East Bengal, India. His father's name was Kalyanashri (Glorious Virtue) and his mother's name was Prabhavarti Shrimati (Glorious Radiance). He was the second of three sons and when he was born he was given the name Chandragarbha (Moon Essence). The name Atisha, which means Peace, was given to him later by the Tibetan king Jangchub Ö because he was always calm and peaceful.

When he was still a child Chandragarbha's parents took him to visit a temple. All along the way thousands of people gathered to see if they could catch a glimpse of the prince. When he saw them Chandragarbha asked 'Who are these people?' and his parents replied 'They are all our subjects.' Compassion arose spontaneously in the prince's heart and he prayed 'May all these people enjoy good fortune as great as my own.' Whenever he met anyone the wish arose naturally in his mind, 'May this person find happiness and be free from suffering.'

Even as a small boy Chandragarbha received visions of Arya Tara, a female enlightened being. Sometimes, while he was on his mother's lap, blue upali flowers would fall from the sky and he would begin to speak, as if to the flowers. Yogis later explained to his mother that the blue flowers she had seen were a sign that Tara was appearing to her son and speaking to him.

When the prince was older his parents wanted to arrange a marriage for him, but Tara advised him 'If you become attached to your kingdom you will be like an elephant when he sinks into mud and cannot lift himself out again because he is so huge and heavy. Do not become attached to this life. Study and practise Dharma. You have been a Spiritual Guide in many of your previous lives and in this life also you will become a Spiritual Guide.' Inspired by these words Chandragarbha developed a very strong interest in studying and practising Dharma and he became determined to attain all the realizations of Buddha's teachings. He knew that to accomplish his aim he would need to find a fully qualified Spiritual Guide. At first he approached a famous Buddhist Teacher called Jetari, who lived nearby, and requested Dharma instructions on how to find release from samsara. Jetari gave him instructions on refuge and bodhichitta, and then told him that if he wanted to practise purely he should go to Nalanda and learn from the Spiritual Guide

Bodhibhadra.

When he met Bodhibhadra the prince said 'I realize that samsara is meaningless and that only liberation and full enlightenment are really worthwhile. Please give Dharma instructions that will lead me quickly to the state beyond sorrow, nirvana.' Bodhibhadra gave him brief instructions on generating bodhichitta and then advised 'If you wish to practise Dharma purely you should seek the Spiritual Guide Vidyakokila.' Bodhibhadra knew that Vidyakokila was a great meditator who had gained a perfect realization of emptiness and was very skilful in teaching the stages of the profound path.

Vidyakokila gave Chandragarbha complete instructions on both the profound path and the vast path and then sent him to study with the Spiritual Guide Avadhutipa. Avadhutipa did not give guidance immediately but told the prince to go to Rahulagupta to receive instructions on Hevajra and Heruka Tantras and then to return to him to receive more detailed instructions on Tantra, or Secret Mantra. Rahulagupta gave Chandragarbha the secret name Janavajra (Indestructible Wisdom) and his first empowerment, which was into the practice of Hevajra. Then he told him to go home and obtain the consent of his parents.

Although the prince was not attached to worldly life it was still important for him to have his parents' permission to practise in the way he wished. Thus he returned to his parents and said 'If I practise Dharma purely, then, as Arya Tara has predicted, I shall be able to repay your kindness and the kindness of all living beings. If I can do this my human life will not have been wasted. Otherwise, even though I may spend all my time in a glorious palace, my life will be meaningless. Please give me your consent to leave the kingdom and dedicate my whole life to the practice of Dharma.'

Chandragarbha's father was unhappy to hear this and wanted to prevent his son from giving up his prospects as future king, but his mother was delighted to hear that her son wished to dedicate his life to Dharma. She remembered that at his birth there had been marvellous signs, such as rainbows, and she remembered miracles like the blue upali flowers falling from the sky. She knew that her son was no ordinary prince and she gave her permission without hesitation. In time, the king also granted his son's wish.

Chandragarbha returned to Avadhutipa and for seven years he received instructions on Secret Mantra. He became so accomplished that on one occasion he developed pride, thinking 'Probably I know more about Secret Mantra than anyone else in the whole world.' That night in his dream Dakinis

came and showed him rare scriptures that he had never seen before. They asked him ‘What do these texts mean?’, but he had no idea. When he awoke, his pride was gone.

Later, Chandragarbha began to think that he should emulate Avadhutipa’s way of practising and strive as a layman to attain enlightenment quickly by practising Mahamudra depending upon an action mudra; but he received a vision of Heruka who told him that if he were to take ordination he would be able to help countless beings and spread Dharma far and wide. That night he dreamt that he was following a procession of monks in the presence of Buddha Shakyamuni, who was wondering why Chandragarbha had not yet taken ordination. When he awoke from his dream he resolved to become a monk. He received ordination from Shilarakshita, and was given the name Dhipamkara Shrijana.

From the Spiritual Guide Dharmarakshita, Dhipamkara Shrijana received extensive instructions on the *Seven Sets of Abhidharma* and the *Ocean of Great Explanation* – texts written from the point of view of the Vaibhashika system. In this way he mastered the Hinayana teachings.

Still not satisfied, Dhipamkara Shrijana went to receive detailed instructions at Bodh Gaya. One day he overheard a conversation between two ladies who were in fact emanations of Arya Tara. The younger asked the elder ‘What is the principal method for attaining enlightenment quickly?’ and the elder replied ‘It is bodhichitta.’ Hearing this, Dhipamkara Shrijana became determined to attain the precious bodhichitta. Later, while he was circumambulating the great stupa at Bodh Gaya, a statue of Buddha Shakyamuni spoke to him, saying ‘If you wish to attain enlightenment quickly you must gain experience of compassion, love and the precious bodhichitta.’ His desire to realize bodhichitta then became intense. He heard that the Spiritual Guide Serlingpa, who was living far away in a place called Serling, in Sumatra, had attained a very special experience of bodhichitta and was able to give instructions on the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*.

It took Dhipamkara Shrijana thirteen months to sail to Sumatra. When he arrived there he offered Serlingpa a mandala and made his requests. Serlingpa told him that the instructions would take twelve years to transmit. Dhipamkara Shrijana stayed in Sumatra for twelve years and finally gained the precious realization of bodhichitta. Then he returned to India.

By relying upon his Spiritual Guides, Atisha gained special knowledge of the three sets of Buddha’s teachings – the set of moral discipline, the set of

discourses and the set of wisdom; and of the four classes of Tantra. He also mastered arts and sciences such as poetry, rhetoric and astrology, was an excellent physician, and was very skilled in crafts and technology.

Atisha also gained all the realizations of the three higher trainings: training in higher moral discipline, training in higher concentration and training in higher wisdom. Since all the stages of Sutra, such as the six perfections, the five paths, the ten grounds; and all the stages of Tantra, such as generation stage and completion stage, are included within the three higher trainings, Atisha therefore gained all the realizations of the stages of the path.

There are three types of higher moral discipline: the higher moral discipline of the Pratimoksha vows, or vows of individual liberation; the higher moral discipline of the Bodhisattva vow; and the higher moral discipline of the Tantric vows. The vows to abandon two hundred and fifty-three downfalls, undertaken by a fully ordained monk, are amongst the Pratimoksha vows. Atisha never broke any one of these. This shows that he possessed very strong mindfulness and very great conscientiousness. He also kept purely the Bodhisattva vow to avoid eighteen root downfalls and forty-six secondary downfalls, and he kept purely all his Tantric vows.

The attainments of higher concentration and higher wisdom are divided into common and uncommon. A common attainment is one that is gained by practitioners of both Sutra and Tantra, and an uncommon attainment is one that is gained only by practitioners of Tantra. By training in higher concentration Atisha gained the common concentration of tranquil abiding and, based on that, clairvoyance, miracle powers and the common virtues. He also attained uncommon concentrations such as the concentrations of generation stage and completion stage of Secret Mantra. By training in higher wisdom Atisha gained the common realization of emptiness, and the uncommon realizations of example clear light and meaning clear light of Secret Mantra.

Atisha mastered the teachings of both Hinayana and Mahayana and was held in respect by Teachers of both traditions. He was like a king, the crown ornament of Indian Buddhists, and was regarded as a second Buddha.

Before Atisha's time the thirty-seventh king of Tibet, Trisong Detsen (circa AD 754-97), had invited Padmasambhava, Shantarakshita and other Buddhist Teachers from India to Tibet, and through their influence pure Dharma had flourished; but some years later a Tibetan king called Lang Darma (circa AD 836) destroyed the pure Dharma in Tibet and abolished the

Sangha. Until that time most of the kings had been religious, but it was a dark age in Tibet during Lang Darma's evil reign. About seventy years after his death Dharma began to flourish once again in the upper part of Tibet through the efforts of great Teachers such as the translator Rinchen Sangpo, and it also began to flourish in the lower part of Tibet through the efforts of a great Teacher called Gongpa Rabsel. Gradually, Dharma spread to central Tibet.

At that time there was no pure practice of the union of Sutra and Tantra. The two were thought to be contradictory, like fire and water. When people practised Sutra they abandoned Tantra, and when they practised Tantra they abandoned Sutra, including even the rules of the Vinaya. False teachers came from India wishing to procure some of Tibet's plentiful gold. Pretending to be Spiritual Guides and Yogis they introduced perversions such as black magic, creating apparitions, sexual practices and ritual murder. These malpractices became quite widespread.

A king called Yeshe Ö and his nephew Jangchub Ö, who lived in Ngari in western Tibet, were greatly concerned about what was happening to the Dharma in their country. The king wept when he thought of the purity of Dharma in former times compared with the impure Dharma now being practised. He was grieved to see how hardened and uncontrolled the minds of the people had become. He thought 'How wonderful it would be if pure Dharma were to flourish once again in Tibet to tame the minds of our people.' To fulfil this wish he sent Tibetans to India to learn Sanskrit and train in Dharma, but many of these people were unable to endure the hot climate. The few who survived learnt Sanskrit and trained very well in Dharma. Amongst them was the translator Rinchen Sangpo, who received many instructions and then returned to Tibet.

Since this plan had not met with much success Yeshe Ö decided to invite an authentic Teacher from India. He sent a group of Tibetans to India with a large quantity of gold, and gave them the task of seeking out the most qualified Spiritual Guide in India. He advised them all to study Dharma and gain perfect knowledge of Sanskrit. These Tibetans suffered all the hardships of climate and travel in order to accomplish his wishes. Some of them became famous translators. They translated many scriptures and sent them to the king, to his great delight.

When these Tibetans returned to Tibet they informed Yeshe Ö, 'In India there are many very learned Buddhist Teachers, but the most distinguished and sublime of all is Dhipamkara Shrijana. We would like to invite him to

Tibet, but he has thousands of disciples in India.’ When Yeshe Ö heard the name ‘Dhipamkara Shrijana’ he was pleased, and became determined to invite this Master to Tibet. Since he had already used most of his gold and more was now needed to invite Dhipamkara Shrijana to Tibet, the king set off on an expedition to search for more gold. When he arrived at one of the borders a hostile non-Buddhist king captured him and threw him into prison. When the news reached Jangchub Ö he considered ‘I am powerful enough to wage war on this king, but if I do so many people will suffer and I shall have to commit many harmful, destructive actions.’ He decided to make an appeal for his uncle’s release, but the king responded by saying ‘I shall release your uncle only if you either become my subject or bring me a quantity of gold as heavy as your uncle’s body.’ With great difficulty Jangchub Ö managed to gather gold equal in weight to his uncle’s body, less the weight of his head. Since the king demanded the extra amount, Jangchub Ö prepared to go in search of more gold, but before he set out he visited his uncle. He found Yeshe Ö physically weak but in a good state of mind. Jangchub Ö spoke through the bars of the prison ‘Soon I shall be able to release you for I have managed to collect almost all the gold.’ Yeshe Ö replied ‘Please do not treat me as if I were important. You must not give the gold to this hostile king. Send it all to India and offer it to Dhipamkara Shrijana. This is my greatest wish. I shall give my life joyfully for the sake of restoring pure Dharma in Tibet. Please deliver this message to Dhipamkara Shrijana. Let him know that I have given my life to invite him to Tibet. Since he has compassion for the Tibetan people, when he receives this message he will accept our invitation.’

Jangchub Ö sent the translator Nagtso together with some companions to India with the gold. When they met Dhipamkara Shrijana they told him what was happening in Tibet and how the people wanted to invite a Spiritual Guide from India. They told him how much gold the king had sent as an offering and how many Tibetans had died for the sake of restoring pure Dharma. They told him how Yeshe Ö had sacrificed his life to bring him to Tibet. When they had made their request Dhipamkara Shrijana considered what they had said and accepted their invitation. Although he had many disciples in India and was working very hard there for the sake of Dharma, he knew that there was no pure Dharma in Tibet. He had also received a prediction from Arya Tara that if he were to go to Tibet he would benefit countless living beings. Compassion arose in his heart when he thought how many Tibetans had died in India, and he was especially moved by the sacrifice of Yeshe Ö.

Dhipamkara Shrijana had to make his way to Tibet in secret, for had his Indian disciples known that he was leaving India they would have prevented him. He said that he was making a pilgrimage to Nepal, but from Nepal he passed into Tibet. When his Indian disciples eventually realized that he was not going to return they protested that the Tibetans were thieves who had stolen their Spiritual Guide!

Since it was customary in those days, as it is today, to greet an honoured guest in style, Jangchub Ö sent an entourage of three hundred horsemen with many eminent Tibetans to the border to welcome Atisha and offer him a horse to ease the difficult journey to Ngari. Atisha rode at the centre of the three hundred horsemen, and by means of his miracle powers he sat one cubit above his horse's back. When they saw him, those who previously had no respect for him developed very strong faith, and everyone said that the second Buddha had arrived in Tibet.

When Atisha reached Ngari, Jangchub Ö requested him, 'O Compassionate Atisha, please give instructions to help the Tibetan people. Please give advice that everyone can follow. Please give us special instructions so that we can practise all the paths of Sutra and Tantra together.' To fulfil this wish Atisha composed and taught *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, the first text written on the stages of the path, Lamrim. He gave these instructions first in Ngari and then in central Tibet. Many disciples who heard these teachings developed great wisdom.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF KADAM LAMRIM

Atisha wrote the original Kadam Lamrim based on *Ornament of Clear Realization* by Buddha Maitreya, which is a commentary to the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* that Buddha Shakyamuni taught on Massed Vultures Mountain in Rajagriha, India. Later, Je Tsongkhapa wrote his extensive, middling and condensed Kadam Lamrim texts as commentaries to Atisha's Kadam Lamrim instructions, and through this the precious Buddhadharma of Kadam Lamrim flourished in many countries in the East and now in the West. The Kadam Lamrim instructions, the union of Buddha's teachings and Atisha's special instructions, are presented in three stages: the instructions on the stages of the path of a person of initial scope; the instructions on the stages of the path of a person of middling scope; and the instructions on the

stages of the path of a person of great scope.

All Buddha's teachings, both Sutra and Tantra, are included within these three sets of instructions. Buddha's teachings are the supreme medicine that permanently cures both physical sickness and the sickness of delusions. Just as doctors give different medicine for different sicknesses, so Buddha gave different Dharma medicine according to people's different capacities. He gave simple teachings to those of initial scope, profound teachings to those of middling scope, and very profound teachings to those of great scope. In practice, all these teachings are part of Kadam Lamrim, which is the main body of Buddha's teachings; there is not a single teaching of Buddha that is not included within Kadam Lamrim. For this reason, Je Tsongkhapa said that when we listen to the entire Lamrim we are listening to all Buddha's teachings and when we practise the entire Lamrim we are practising all Buddha's teachings. Kadam Lamrim is the condensation of all Buddha's teachings; it is very practical and suitable for everyone and its presentation is superior to other instructions.

Through gaining experience of Lamrim we shall understand that none of Buddha's teachings are contradictory, we shall put all Buddha's teachings into practice, we shall easily realize Buddha's ultimate view and intention, and we shall become free from all mistaken views and intentions. Everyone, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, needs permanent liberation from suffering, and pure and everlasting happiness. This wish will be fulfilled through Lamrim practice; therefore it is the real wishfulfilling jewel.

In general, all Buddha's teachings, the Dharma, are very precious, but Kadam Dharma or Lamrim is a very special Buddhadharma that is suitable for everyone without exception. The great Master Dromtonpa said, 'Kadam Dharma is like a mala made of gold.' Just as everyone, even those who do not use a mala (or prayer beads), would be happy to accept a gift of a gold mala because it is made of gold, in a similar way, everyone, even non-Buddhists, can receive benefit from Kadam Dharma. This is because there is no difference between Kadam Dharma and people's everyday experiences. Even without studying or listening to Dharma, some people often come to similar conclusions as those explained in Kadam Dharma teachings through looking at newspapers or television and understanding the world situation. This is because Kadam Dharma accords with people's daily experience; it cannot be separated from daily life. Everyone needs it to make their lives happy and meaningful, to solve temporarily their human problems, and to enable them

ultimately to find pure and everlasting happiness through controlling their anger, attachment, jealousy, and especially ignorance.

In this spiritually degenerate time there are five impurities that are increasing throughout the world: (1) our environment is becoming increasingly impure because of pollution; (2) our water, air and food are becoming increasingly impure, also because of pollution; (3) our body is becoming increasingly impure because sickness and disease are now more prevalent; (4) our mind is becoming increasingly impure because our delusions are getting stronger and stronger; and (5) our actions are becoming increasingly impure because we have no control over our delusions.

Because of these five impurities, suffering, problems and dangers are increasing everywhere. However, through Lamrim practice we can transform our experience of all these impurities into the spiritual path that leads us to the pure and everlasting happiness of liberation and enlightenment. We can use all the difficulties that we see in the world as spiritual teachings that encourage us to develop renunciation, the wish to liberate ourselves from the cycle of impure life; compassion, the wish that others may be liberated permanently from the cycle of impure life; and the wisdom that realizes that all these impurities are the results of our non-virtuous actions. In this way, through Lamrim practice we can transform all adverse conditions into opportunities for developing realizations of the spiritual path that will bring us pure and everlasting happiness.

Whenever Lamrim practitioners experience difficulties and suffering they think, 'Countless other living beings experience greater suffering and difficulties than I do', and in this way they develop or increase their compassion for all living beings, which leads them quickly to the supreme happiness of enlightenment. Kadam Lamrim is the supreme medicine that can permanently cure all the sufferings of sickness, ageing, death and rebirth; it is the scientific method to improve our human nature and qualities, and to solve our daily problems. Kadam Lamrim is the great mirror of Dharma in which we can see the way things really are; and through which we can see what we should know, what we should abandon, what we should practise and what we should attain. And it is only by using this mirror that we can see the great kindness of all living beings.

Kadampa practitioners emphasize training in meditation. What is meditation? Meditation is an action of mind whose nature is single-pointed concentration and whose function is to make the mind peaceful and calm. We

want to be happy all the time, even during our dreams. How can we do this? We can do this through training in meditation because meditation makes our mind become peaceful, and when our mind is peaceful we are happy all the time, even if our external conditions are poor. On the other hand, when our mind is not peaceful we are not happy, even if our external conditions are excellent. We can understand this through our own experience. Since the actual method to make our mind peaceful is training in meditation, we should apply effort to training in meditation. Whenever we meditate, we are performing an action or karma that causes us to experience peace of mind in the future. From this we can understand the importance of meditation practice.

The objects of our meditation should be those that are meaningful objects (these will be explained extensively below), so that through training in meditation we can free ourselves permanently from all the sufferings of this life and our countless future lives, and we can attain the supreme happiness of enlightenment, as Buddha showed. This is the best example for us. However, at the beginning we can use our breathing as the object of our meditation and practise breathing meditation, which is quite simple.

How do we practise breathing meditation? First we should relax both physically and mentally, and stop thinking about anything. Then we should gently and naturally inhale and exhale through the nostrils, not through the mouth, and single-pointedly concentrate on the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. We should remain concentrated on this sensation for as long as possible. If after doing this our mind is still not peaceful we should repeat this breathing meditation again and again until our mind becomes completely peaceful. Then we should apply effort to remaining continually peaceful day and night. In this way we can make ourselves as well as our friends and family happy all the time.



Atisha

The Path of a Person of Initial Scope

In this context, a 'person of initial scope' refers to someone who has an initial capacity for developing spiritual understanding and realizations.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF OUR HUMAN LIFE

The purpose of understanding the preciousness of our human life is to encourage oneself to take the real meaning of our human life and not to waste it in meaningless activities. Our human life is very precious and meaningful, but only if we use it to attain permanent liberation and the supreme happiness of enlightenment. We should encourage oneself to accomplish the real meaning of our human life through understanding and contemplating the following explanation.

Many people believe that material development is the real meaning of human life, but we can see that no matter how much material development there is in the world it never reduces human suffering and problems. Instead, it often causes suffering and problems to increase; therefore it is not the real meaning of human life. We should know that at present we have reached the human world for just a brief moment from our former lives, and we have the opportunity to attain the supreme happiness of enlightenment through practising Dharma. This is our extraordinary good fortune. When we attain enlightenment we shall have fulfilled our own wishes, and we can fulfil the wishes of all other living beings; we shall have liberated ourselves permanently from the sufferings of this life and countless future lives, and we can directly benefit each and every living being every day. The attainment of enlightenment is therefore the real meaning of human life.

Enlightenment is the inner light of wisdom that is permanently free from all mistaken appearance, and whose function is to bestow mental peace upon each and every living being every day. Right now we have obtained a human rebirth and have the opportunity to attain enlightenment through Dharma practice, so if we waste this precious opportunity in meaningless activities there is no greater loss and no greater foolishness. This is because in future such a precious opportunity will be extremely hard to find. In one Sutra

Buddha illustrates this by giving the following analogy. He asks his disciples, ‘Suppose there existed a vast and deep ocean the size of this world, and on its surface there floated a golden yoke, and at the bottom of the ocean there lived a blind turtle who surfaced only once in every one hundred thousand years. How often would that turtle raise its head through the middle of the yoke?’ His disciple, Ananda, answers that, indeed, it would be extremely rare.

In this context, the vast and deep ocean refers to samsara – the cycle of impure life that we have experienced since beginningless time, continually in life after life without end – the golden yoke refers to Buddhadharma, and the blind turtle refers to us. Although we are not physically a turtle, mentally we are not much different; and although our physical eyes may not be blind, our wisdom eyes are. For most of our countless previous lives we have remained at the bottom of the ocean of samsara, in the three lower realms – the animal, hungry ghost and hell realms – surfacing only once in every one hundred thousand years or so as a human being. Even when we briefly reach the upper realm of samsara’s ocean as a human being, it is extremely rare to meet the golden yoke of Buddhadharma: the ocean of samsara is extremely vast, the golden yoke of Buddhadharma does not remain in one place but moves from place to place, and our wisdom eyes are always blind. For these reasons, Buddha says that in the future, even if we obtain a human rebirth, it will be extremely rare to meet Buddhadharma again; meeting Kadam Dharma is even more rare than this. We can see that the great majority of human beings in the world, even though they have briefly reached the upper realm of samsara as human beings, have not met Buddhadharma. This is because their wisdom eyes have not opened.

What does ‘meeting Buddhadharma’ mean? It means entering into Buddhism by sincerely seeking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and thus having the opportunity to enter and make progress on the path to enlightenment. If we do not meet Buddhadharma we have no opportunity to do this, and therefore we have no opportunity to accomplish the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment, the real meaning of human life. In conclusion, we should think:

At present I have briefly reached the human world and have the opportunity to attain permanent liberation from suffering and the supreme happiness of enlightenment through putting Dharma into practice. If I waste this precious opportunity in meaningless activities there is no

greater loss and no greater foolishness.

With this thought we make the strong determination to practise the Dharma of Buddha's teachings on renunciation, universal compassion and the profound view of emptiness now, while we have the opportunity. We then meditate on this determination again and again. We should practise this contemplation and meditation every day in many sessions, and in this way encourage ourself to take the real meaning of our human life.

We should ask ourself what we consider to be most important – what do we wish for, strive for, or daydream about? For some people it is material possessions, such as a large house with all the latest luxuries, a fast car or a well-paid job. For others it is reputation, good looks, power, excitement or adventure. Many try to find the meaning of their life in relationships with their family and circle of friends. All these things can make us superficially happy for a short while but they will also cause us much worry and suffering. They will never give us the real happiness that all of us, in our hearts, long for. Since we cannot take them with us when we die, if we have made them the principal meaning of our life they will eventually let us down. As an end in themselves worldly attainments are hollow; they are not the real meaning of human life.

With our human life we can attain the supreme permanent peace of mind, known as 'nirvana', and enlightenment by putting Dharma into practice. Since these attainments are non-deceptive and ultimate states of happiness they are the real meaning of human life. However, because our desire for worldly enjoyment is so strong, we have little or no interest in Dharma practice. From a spiritual point of view, this lack of interest in Dharma practice is a type of laziness called the 'laziness of attachment'. For as long as we have this laziness, the door to liberation will be closed to us, and consequently we shall continue to experience misery and suffering in this life and in countless future lives. The way to overcome this laziness, the main obstacle to our Dharma practice, is to meditate on death.

We need to contemplate and meditate on our death again and again until we gain a deep realization of death. Although on an intellectual level we all know that eventually we are going to die, our awareness of death remains superficial. Since our intellectual knowledge of death does not touch our hearts, each and every day we continue to think 'I shall not die today, I shall not die today.' Even on the day of our death, we are still thinking about what

we shall do tomorrow or next week. This mind that thinks every day ‘I shall not die today’ is deceptive – it leads us in the wrong direction and causes our human life to become empty. On the other hand, through meditating on death we shall gradually replace the deceptive thought ‘I shall not die today’ with the non-deceptive thought ‘I may die today.’ The mind that spontaneously thinks each and every day ‘I may die today’ is the realization of death. It is this realization that directly eliminates our laziness of attachment and opens the door to the spiritual path.

In general, we may die today or we may not die today – we do not know. However, if we think each day ‘I may not die today’, this thought will deceive us because it comes from our ignorance; whereas if instead we think each day ‘I may die today’, this thought will not deceive us because it comes from our wisdom. This beneficial thought will prevent our laziness of attachment, and will encourage us to prepare for the welfare of our countless future lives or to put great effort into entering the path to liberation and enlightenment. In this way, we shall make our present human life meaningful. Until now we have wasted our countless former lives without any meaning; we have brought nothing with us from our former lives except delusions and suffering.

WHAT DOES OUR DEATH MEAN?

Our death is the permanent separation of our body and mind. We may experience many temporary separations of our body and mind, but these are not our death. For example, when those who have completed their training in the practice known as ‘transference of consciousness’ engage in meditation, their mind separates from their body. Their body remains where they are meditating, and their mind goes to a Pure Land and then returns to their body. At night, during dreams, our body remains in bed but our mind goes to various places of the dream world and then returns to our body. These separations of our body and mind are not our death because they are only temporary.

At death our mind separates from our body permanently. Our body remains at the place of this life but our mind goes to various places of our future lives, like a bird leaving one nest and flying to another. This clearly shows the existence of our countless future lives, and that the nature and

function of our body and mind are very different. Our body is a visual form that possesses colour and shape, but our mind is a formless continuum that always lacks colour and shape. The nature of our mind is empty like space, and its function is to perceive or understand objects. Through this we can understand that our brain is not our mind. The brain is simply a part of our body that, for example, can be photographed, whereas our mind cannot.

We may not be happy to hear about our death, but contemplating and meditating on death is very important for the effectiveness of our Dharma practice. This is because it prevents the main obstacle to our Dharma practice – the laziness of attachment to the things of this life – and it encourages us to practise pure Dharma right now. If we do this we shall accomplish the real meaning of human life before our death.

HOW TO MEDITATE ON DEATH

First we engage in the following contemplation:

I shall definitely die. There is no way to prevent my body from finally decaying. Day by day, moment by moment, my life is slipping away. I have no idea when I shall die; the time of death is completely uncertain. Many young people die before their parents, some die the moment they are born – there is no certainty in this world. Furthermore, there are so many causes of untimely death. The lives of many strong and healthy people are destroyed by accidents. There is no guarantee that I shall not die today.

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we mentally repeat over and over again ‘I may die today, I may die today’, and concentrate on the feeling it evokes. We transform our mind into this feeling ‘I may die today’ and remain on it single-pointedly for as long as possible. We should practise this meditation repeatedly until we spontaneously believe each and every day ‘I may die today’. Eventually we shall come to a conclusion: ‘Since I shall soon have to depart from this world, there is no sense in my becoming attached to the things of this life. Instead, from now on I will devote my whole life to practising Dharma purely and sincerely.’ We then maintain this determination day and night.

During the meditation break, without laziness we should apply effort to our

Dharma practice. Realizing that worldly pleasures are deceptive, and that they distract us from using our life in a meaningful way, we should abandon attachment to them. In this way, we can eliminate the main obstacle to pure Dharma practice.

THE DANGERS OF LOWER REBIRTH

The purpose of this explanation is to encourage us to prepare protection from the dangers of lower rebirth. If we do not do this now, while we have a human life with its freedoms and endowments and we have the opportunity to do so, it will be too late once we have taken any of the three lower rebirths; and it will be extremely difficult to obtain such a precious human life again. It is said to be easier for human beings to attain enlightenment than it is for beings such as animals to attain a precious human rebirth. Understanding this will encourage us to abandon non-virtue, or negative actions, to practise virtue, or positive actions, and to seek refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (the supreme spiritual friends); this is our actual protection.

Performing non-virtuous actions is the main cause of taking lower rebirth, whereas practising virtue and seeking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are the main causes of taking a precious human rebirth – a rebirth in which we have the opportunity to attain permanent liberation from all suffering. Heavy non-virtuous actions are the main cause of rebirth as a hell being, middling non-virtuous actions are the main cause of rebirth as a hungry ghost, and lesser non-virtuous actions are the main cause of rebirth as an animal. There are many examples given in Buddhist scriptures of how non-virtuous actions lead to rebirth in the three lower realms.

There was once a hunter whose wife came from a family of animal farmers. After he died he took rebirth as a cow belonging to his wife's family. A butcher then bought this cow, slaughtered it and sold the meat. The hunter was reborn seven times as a cow belonging to the same family, and in this way became food for other people.

In Tibet there is a lake called Yamdroktso, where many people from the nearby town used to spend their whole lives fishing. At one time a great Yogi with clairvoyance visited the town and said, 'I see the people of this town and the fish in this lake are continually switching their positions.' What he meant was that the people of the town who enjoyed fishing were reborn as the fish,

the food of other people, and the fish in the lake were reborn as the people who enjoyed fishing. In this way, changing their physical aspect, they were continually killing and eating each other. This cycle of misery continued from generation to generation.

HOW TO MEDITATE ON THE DANGERS OF LOWER REBIRTH

First we engage in the following contemplation:

When the oil of an oil lamp is exhausted, the flame goes out because the flame is produced from the oil; but when our body dies our consciousness is not extinguished, because consciousness is not produced from the body. When we die our mind has to leave this present body, which is just a temporary abode, and find another body, rather like a bird leaving one nest to fly to another. Our mind has no freedom to remain and no choice about where to go. We are blown to the place of our next rebirth by the winds of our actions or karma (our good fortune or misfortune). If the karma that ripens at our death time is negative, we shall definitely take a lower rebirth. Heavy negative karma causes rebirth in hell, middling negative karma causes rebirth as a hungry ghost, and lesser negative karma causes rebirth as an animal.

It is very easy to commit heavy negative karma. For example, simply by swatting a mosquito out of anger we create the cause to be reborn in hell. Throughout this and all our countless previous lives we have committed many heavy negative actions. Unless we have already purified these actions by practising sincere confession, their potentialities remain in our mental continuum, and any one of these negative potentialities could ripen when we die. Bearing this in mind, we should ask ourselves, 'If I die today, where shall I be tomorrow? It is quite possible that I shall find myself in the animal realm, among the hungry ghosts, or in hell. If someone were to call me a stupid cow today, I would find it difficult to bear, but what shall I do if I actually become a cow, a pig, or a fish – the food of human beings?'

Having repeatedly contemplated these points and understood how beings in the lower realms, such as animals, experience suffering, we generate a

strong fear of taking rebirth in the lower realms. This feeling of fear is the object of our meditation. We then hold this without forgetting it; our mind should remain on this feeling of fear single-pointedly for as long as possible. If we lose the object of our meditation we renew the feeling of fear by immediately remembering it or by repeating the contemplation.

During the meditation break we try never to forget our feeling of fear of taking rebirth in the lower realms. In general fear is meaningless, but the fear generated through the above contemplation and meditation has immense meaning, as it arises from wisdom and not from ignorance. This fear is the main cause of seeking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which is the actual protection from such dangers, and helps us to be mindful and conscientious in avoiding non-virtuous actions.

GOING FOR REFUGE

In this context, ‘going for refuge’ means seeking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The purpose of this practice is to protect ourselves permanently from taking lower rebirth. At present, because we are human, we are free from rebirth as an animal, hungry ghost or hell being, but this is only temporary. We are like a prisoner who gets permission to stay at home for a week, but then has to return to prison. We need permanent liberation from the sufferings of this life and countless future lives. This depends upon entering, making progress on and completing the Buddhist path to liberation, which in turn depends upon entering Buddhism.

We enter Buddhism through the practice of going for refuge. For our practice of refuge to be qualified, while visualizing Buddha in front of us we should verbally or mentally make the promise to seek refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha throughout our life. This promise is our refuge vow, and is the gateway through which we enter Buddhism. For as long as we keep this promise we are inside Buddhism, but if we break this promise we are outside. By entering and remaining inside Buddhism we have the opportunity to begin, make progress on and complete the Buddhist path to liberation and enlightenment.

We should never give up our promise to seek refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha throughout our life. Going for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha means that we apply effort to receiving Buddha’s blessings, to

putting Dharma into practice and to receiving help from Sangha. These are the three principal commitments of the refuge vow. Through maintaining and sincerely practising these three principal commitments of refuge we can fulfil our final goal.

The main reason why we need to make the determination and promise to seek refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha throughout our life is that we need to attain permanent liberation from suffering. At present we may be free from physical suffering and mental pain, but as mentioned earlier this freedom is only temporary. Later in this life and in our countless future lives we shall have to experience unbearable physical suffering and mental pain continually, in life after life without end.

When our life is in danger or we are threatened by someone, we usually seek refuge in the police. Of course, sometimes the police can protect us from a particular danger, but they cannot give us permanent liberation from death. When we are seriously ill we seek refuge in doctors. Sometimes doctors can cure a particular illness, but no doctor can give us permanent liberation from sickness. What we really need is permanent liberation from all sufferings, and as human beings we can achieve this by seeking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Buddhas are 'awakened', which means that they have awakened from the sleep of ignorance and are free from the dreams of samsara, the cycle of impure life. They are completely pure beings who are permanently free from all delusions and mistaken appearance. As mentioned earlier, Buddha's function is to bestow mental peace on each and every living being every day by giving blessings. We know that we are happy when our mind is peaceful, and unhappy when it is not. It is therefore clear that our happiness depends upon our having a peaceful mind and not on good external conditions. Even if our external conditions are poor, if we maintain a peaceful mind all the time we shall always be happy. Through continually receiving Buddha's blessings we can maintain a peaceful mind all the time. Buddha is therefore the source of our happiness. Dharma is the actual protection through which we are permanently released from the sufferings of sickness, ageing, death and rebirth; and Sangha are the supreme spiritual friends who guide us to correct spiritual paths. Through these three precious wishfulfilling jewels, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – known as the 'Three Jewels' – we can fulfil our own wishes as well as the wishes of all living beings.

Every day from the depths of our heart we should recite requesting prayers

to the enlightened Buddhas, while maintaining deep faith in them. This is a simple method for us to receive the Buddhas' blessings continually. We should also join group prayers, known as 'pujas', organized at Buddhist Temples or Prayer Halls, which are powerful methods to receive the Buddhas' blessings and protection.

HOW TO MEDITATE ON GOING FOR REFUGE

First we engage in the following contemplation:

I want to protect and liberate myself permanently from the sufferings of this life and countless future lives. I can accomplish this only by receiving Buddha's blessings, putting Dharma into practice and receiving help from Sangha – the supreme spiritual friends.

Thinking deeply in this way, we first make the strong determination and then the promise to seek refuge sincerely in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha throughout our life. We should meditate on this determination every day and maintain our promise continually for the rest of our life. As the commitments of our refuge vow we should always apply effort to receiving Buddha's blessings, to putting Dharma into practice and to receiving help from Sangha, our pure spiritual friends including our Spiritual Teacher. This is how we go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Through this we shall accomplish our aim – permanent liberation from all the sufferings of this life and countless future lives, the real meaning of our human life.

To maintain our promise to go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha throughout our life, and so that we and all living beings may receive Buddha's blessings and protection, we recite the following refuge prayer every day with strong faith:

*I and all sentient beings, until we achieve enlightenment,
Go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.*

WHAT IS KARMA?

The purpose of understanding and believing in karma is to prevent future suffering and to establish the basic foundation for the path to liberation and enlightenment. Generally, karma means 'action'. From non-virtuous actions comes suffering and from virtuous actions comes happiness: if we believe this, we believe in karma. Buddha gave extensive teachings that prove the truth of this statement, and many different examples that show the special connection between the actions of our former lives and our experiences of this life, some of which are explained in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*.

In our previous lives we performed various kinds of non-virtuous actions that caused others suffering. As a result of these non-virtuous actions, various kinds of miserable conditions and situations arise and we experience endless human suffering and problems. This is the same for all other living beings.

We should judge whether or not we believe that the main cause of suffering is our non-virtuous actions and the main cause of happiness is our virtuous actions. If we do not believe this we shall never apply effort to accumulating virtuous actions, or merit, and we shall never purify our non-virtuous actions, and because of this we shall experience suffering and difficulties continually, in life after life without end.

Every action we perform leaves an imprint on our very subtle mind, and each imprint eventually gives rise to its own effect. Our mind is like a field, and performing actions is like sowing seeds in that field. Virtuous actions sow seeds of future happiness and non-virtuous actions sow seeds of future suffering. These seeds remain dormant in our mind until the conditions for them to ripen occur, and then they produce their effect. In some cases, this can happen many lifetimes after the original action was performed.

The seeds that ripen when we die are very important because they determine what kind of rebirth we shall take in our next life. Which particular seed ripens at death depends upon the state of mind in which we die. If we die with a peaceful mind, this will stimulate a virtuous seed and we shall experience a fortunate rebirth. However, if we die with an unpeaceful mind, such as in a state of anger, this will stimulate a non-virtuous seed and we shall experience an unfortunate rebirth. This is similar to the way in which nightmares are triggered by our being in an agitated state of mind just before falling asleep.

All inappropriate actions, including killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, hurtful speech, idle chatter, covetousness, malice and holding wrong views, are non-virtuous actions. When we abandon non-

virtuous actions and apply effort to purifying our previous non-virtuous actions we are practising moral discipline. This will prevent us from experiencing future suffering and from taking a lower rebirth. Examples of virtuous actions are training in all the meditations and other spiritual practices presented in this book. Meditation is a virtuous mental action that is the main cause for experiencing mental peace in the future. Whenever we practise meditation, whether or not our meditation is clear, we are performing a virtuous mental action that is a cause of our future happiness and peace of mind. We are normally concerned mainly about bodily and verbal actions, but in reality mental actions are more important. Our bodily and verbal actions depend upon our mental action – upon our mentally making a decision.

Whenever we perform virtuous actions such as meditation or other spiritual practices we should have the following mental determination:

While riding the horse of virtuous actions
I will guide it into the path of liberation with the reins of renunciation;
And through urging this horse onward with the whip of effort,
I will quickly reach the Pure Land of liberation and enlightenment.

Having contemplated the above explanation, we should think:

Since I myself never wish to suffer and always want to be happy, I must abandon and purify my non-virtuous actions and sincerely perform virtuous actions.

We should meditate on this determination every day, and put our determination into practice.

The Path of a Person of Middling Scope

In this context, a ‘person of middling scope’ refers to someone who has a middling capacity for developing spiritual understanding and realizations.

WHAT WE SHOULD KNOW

In *Sutra of the Four Noble Truths* Buddha says, ‘You should know suffering.’ In saying this Buddha is advising us that we should know about the unbearable sufferings that we shall experience in our countless future lives, and therefore develop renunciation, the determination to liberate ourselves permanently from these sufferings.

In general, everyone who has physical or mental pain, even animals, understands their own suffering; but when Buddha says ‘You should know sufferings’ he means that we should know the sufferings of our future lives. Through knowing these, we shall develop a strong wish to liberate ourselves from them. This practical advice is important for everybody because, if we have the wish to liberate ourselves from the sufferings of future lives, we shall definitely use our present human life for the freedom and happiness of our countless future lives. There is no greater meaning than this.

If we do not have this wish, we shall waste our precious human life only for the freedom and happiness of this one short life. This would be foolish because our intention and actions would be no different from the intention and actions of animals who are only concerned with this life alone. The great Yogi Milarepa once said to a hunter called Gonpo Dorje:

Your body is human but your mind is that of an animal.
You, a human being, who possess an animal’s mind, please listen to my
song.

Normally we believe that solving the suffering and problems of our present life is most important, and we dedicate our whole life for this purpose. In

reality, the duration of the suffering and problems of this life is very short; if we die tomorrow, they will end tomorrow. However, since the duration of the suffering and problems of future lives is endless, the freedom and happiness of our future lives is vastly more important than the freedom and happiness of this one short life. With the words 'You should know sufferings' Buddha encourages us to use our present human life to prepare for the freedom and happiness of our countless future lives. Those who do this are truly wise.

In future lives, when we are born as an animal, such as a cow or a fish, we shall become the food of other living beings, and we shall have to experience many other kinds of animal suffering. Animals have no freedom, and are used by human beings for food, work and enjoyment. They have no opportunity to improve themselves; even if they hear precious Dharma words it is as meaningless to them as hearing the wind blowing. When we are born as a hungry ghost we shall not have even a tiny drop of water to drink; our only water will be our tears. We shall have to experience the unbearable sufferings of thirst and hunger for many hundreds of years. When we are born as a hell being in the hot hells our body will become inseparable from fire, and others will be able to distinguish between our body and fire only by hearing our suffering cries. We shall have to experience the unbearable torment of our body being burned for millions of years. Like all other phenomena, the hell realms do not exist inherently but exist as mere appearances to mind, like dreams.

When we are born as a desire realm god we experience great conflict and dissatisfaction. Even if we experience some superficial enjoyment, still our desires grow stronger, and we have even more mental suffering than human beings. When we are born as a demi-god we are always jealous of the gods' glory and because of this we have great mental suffering. Our jealousy is like a thorn piercing our mind, causing us to experience both mental and physical suffering for long periods of time. When we are born as a human being we shall have to experience various kinds of human suffering, including the sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing and death.

BIRTH

When our consciousness first enters the union of our father's sperm and our mother's ovum, our body is a very hot, watery substance like white yoghurt

tinted red. In the first moments after conception we have no gross feelings, but as soon as these develop we begin to experience pain. Our body gradually becomes harder and harder, and as our limbs grow it feels as if our body is being stretched out on a rack. Inside our mother's womb it is hot and dark. Our home for nine months is this small, tightly compressed space full of unclean substances. It is like being squashed inside a small water tank full of filthy liquid with the lid tightly shut so that no air or light can come through.

While we are in our mother's womb we experience much pain and fear all on our own. We are extremely sensitive to everything our mother does. When she walks quickly it feels as if we are falling from a high mountain and we are terrified. If she has sexual intercourse it feels as if we are being crushed and suffocated between two huge weights and we panic. If our mother makes just a small jump it feels as if we are being dashed against the ground from a great height. If she drinks anything hot it feels like boiling water scalding our skin, and if she drinks anything cold it feels like an ice-cold shower in midwinter.

When we are emerging from our mother's womb it feels as if we are being forced through a narrow crevice between two hard rocks, and when we are newly born our body is so delicate that any kind of contact is painful. Even if someone holds us very tenderly, his or her hands feel like thorn bushes piercing our flesh, and the most delicate fabrics feel rough and abrasive. By comparison with the softness and smoothness of our mother's womb, every tactile sensation is harsh and painful. If someone picks us up it feels as if we are being swung over a huge precipice, and we feel frightened and insecure. We have forgotten all that we knew in our previous life; we bring only pain and confusion from our mother's womb. Whatever we hear is as meaningless as the sound of wind, and we cannot comprehend anything we perceive. In the first few weeks we are like someone who is blind, deaf and dumb, and suffering from profound amnesia. When we are hungry we cannot say 'I need food', and when we are in pain we cannot say 'This is hurting me.' The only signs we can make are hot tears and furious gestures. Our mother often has no idea what pains and discomforts we are experiencing. We are completely helpless and have to be taught everything – how to eat, how to sit, how to walk, how to talk.

Although we are most vulnerable in the first few weeks of our life, our pains do not cease as we grow up. We continue to experience various kinds of suffering throughout our life. Just as when we light a fire in a large house,

the heat from the fire pervades the whole house and all the heat in the house comes from the fire, so when we are born in samsara, suffering pervades our whole life, and all the miseries we experience arise because we took a contaminated rebirth.

Our human rebirth, contaminated by the poisonous delusion of self-grasping, is the basis of our human suffering; without this basis, there are no human problems. The pains of birth gradually turn into the pains of sickness, ageing and death – they are one continuum.

SICKNESS

Our birth also gives rise to the suffering of sickness. Just as the wind and snow of winter take away the glory of green meadows, trees, forests and flowers, so sickness takes away the youthful splendour of our body, destroying its strength and the power of our senses. If we are usually fit and well, when we become sick we are suddenly unable to engage in all our normal physical activities. Even a champion boxer who is usually able to knock out all his opponents becomes completely helpless when sickness strikes. Sickness makes all our experiences of daily enjoyments disappear and causes us to experience unpleasant feelings day and night.

When we fall ill, we are like a bird that has been soaring in the sky and is suddenly shot down. When a bird is shot, it falls straight to the ground like a lump of lead, and all its glory and power are immediately destroyed. In a similar way, when we become ill we are suddenly incapacitated. If we are seriously ill we may become completely dependent upon others and lose even the ability to control our bodily functions. This transformation is hard to bear, especially for those who pride themselves on their independence and physical well-being.

When we are ill, we feel frustrated as we cannot do our usual work or complete all the tasks we have set ourselves. We easily become impatient with our illness and depressed about all the things we cannot do. We cannot enjoy the things that usually give us pleasure, such as sport, dancing, drinking, eating rich foods, or the company of our friends. All these limitations make us feel even more miserable; and, to add to our unhappiness, we have to endure all the physical pains the illness brings.

When we are sick, not only do we have to experience all the unwanted

pains of the illness itself, but we also have to experience all sorts of other unwished for things. For example, we have to take whatever cure is prescribed, whether it be a foul-tasting medicine, a series of injections, a major operation, or abstinence from something we like very much. If we are to have an operation, we have to go to hospital and accept all the conditions there. We may have to eat food we do not like and stay in bed all day long with nothing to do, and we may feel anxiety about the operation. Our doctor may not explain to us exactly what the problem is and whether or not he or she expects us to survive.

If we learn that our sickness is incurable, and we have no spiritual experience, we shall suffer anxiety, fear and regret. We may become depressed and give up hope, or we may become angry with our illness, feeling that it is an enemy that has maliciously deprived us of all joy.

AGEING

Our birth also gives rise to the pains of ageing. Ageing steals our beauty, our health, our good figure, our fine complexion, our vitality and our comfort. Ageing turns us into objects of contempt. It brings many unwanted pains and takes us swiftly to our death.

As we grow old we lose all the beauty of our youth, and our strong, healthy body becomes weak and burdened with illness. Our once firm and well-proportioned figure becomes bent and disfigured, and our muscles and flesh shrink so that our limbs become like thin sticks and our bones poke out. Our hair loses its colour and shine, and our complexion loses its lustre. Our face becomes wrinkled and our features grow distorted. Milarepa said:

How do old people get up? They get up as if they were heaving a stake out of the ground. How do old people walk about? Once they are on their feet they have to walk gingerly, like bird-catchers. How do old people sit down? They crash down like heavy luggage whose harness has snapped.

We can contemplate the following poem on the sufferings of growing old, written by the scholar Gungtang:

When we are old, our hair becomes white,

But not because we have washed it clean;
It is a sign we shall soon encounter the Lord of Death.

We have wrinkles on our forehead,
But not because we have too much flesh;
It is a warning from the Lord of Death: 'You are about to die.'

Our teeth fall out,
But not to make room for new ones;
It is a sign we shall soon lose the ability to eat human food.

Our faces are ugly and unpleasant,
But not because we are wearing masks;
It is a sign we have lost the mask of youth.

Our heads shake to and fro,
But not because we are in disagreement;
It is the Lord of Death striking our head with the stick he holds in his right
hand.

We walk bent and gazing at the ground,
But not because we are searching for lost needles;
It is a sign we are searching for our lost beauty and memories.

We get up from the ground using all four limbs,
But not because we are imitating animals;
It is a sign our legs are too weak to support our body.

We sit down as if we had suddenly fallen,
But not because we are angry;
It is a sign our body has lost its strength.

Our body sways as we walk,
But not because we think we are important;
It is a sign our legs cannot carry our body.

Our hands shake,
But not because they are itching to steal;

It is a sign the Lord of Death's itchy fingers are stealing our possessions.

We eat very little,
But not because we are miserly;
It is a sign we cannot digest our food.

We wheeze frequently,
But not because we are whispering mantras to the sick;
It is a sign our breathing will soon disappear.

When we are young we can travel around the whole world, but when we are old we can hardly make it to our own front gate. We become too weak to engage in many worldly activities, and our spiritual activities are often curtailed. For example, we have little physical strength to perform virtuous actions, and little mental energy to memorize, contemplate and meditate. We cannot attend teachings that are given in places that are hard to reach or uncomfortable to inhabit. We cannot help others in ways that require physical strength and good health. Deprivations such as these often make old people very sad.

When we grow old, we become like someone who is blind and deaf. We cannot see clearly, and we need stronger and stronger glasses until we can no longer read. We cannot hear clearly, and so it becomes more and more difficult to listen to music or to the television, or to hear what others are saying. Our memory fades. All activities, worldly and spiritual, become more difficult. If we practise meditation it becomes harder for us to gain realizations because our memory and concentration are too weak. We cannot apply ourself to study. Thus, if we have not learnt and trained in spiritual practices when we were younger, the only thing to do when we grow old is to develop regret and wait for the Lord of Death to come.

When we are old we cannot derive the same enjoyment from the things we used to enjoy, such as food, drink and sex. We are too weak to play games and we are often too exhausted even for entertainments. As our lifespan runs out we cannot join young people in their activities. When they travel about we have to stay behind. No one wants to take us with them when we are old, and no one wants to visit us. Even our own grandchildren do not want to stay with us for very long. Old people often think to themselves, 'How wonderful it would be if young people would stay with me. We could go out for walks

and I could show them things'; but young people do not want to be included in their plans. As their life draws to an end, old people experience the sorrow of abandonment and loneliness. They have many special sorrows.

DEATH

Our birth also gives rise to the sufferings of death. If during our life we have worked hard to acquire possessions, and if we have become very attached to them, we shall experience great suffering at the time of death, thinking 'Now I have to leave all my precious possessions behind.' Even now we find it difficult to lend one of our most treasured possessions to someone else, let alone to give it away. No wonder we become so miserable when we realize that in the hands of death we must abandon everything.

When we die we have to part from even our closest friends. We have to leave our partner, even though we may have been together for years and never spent a day apart. If we are very attached to our friends we shall experience great misery at the time of death, but all we shall be able to do is hold their hands. We shall not be able to halt the process of death, even if they plead with us not to die. Usually when we are very attached to someone we feel jealous if he or she leaves us on our own and spends time with someone else, but when we die we shall have to leave our friends with others forever. We shall have to leave everyone, including our family and all the people who have helped us in this life.

When we die, this body that we have cherished and cared for in so many ways will have to be left behind. It will become mindless like a stone, and will be buried in the ground or cremated. If we do not have the inner protection of spiritual experience, at the time of death we shall experience fear and distress, as well as physical pain.

When our consciousness departs from our body at death, all the potentialities we have accumulated in our mind by performing virtuous and non-virtuous actions will go with it. Other than these we cannot take anything out of this world. All other things deceive us. Death ends all our activities – our conversation, our eating, our meeting with friends, our sleep. Everything draws to a close on the day of our death and we must leave all things behind, even the rings on our fingers. In Tibet beggars carry a stick to defend themselves against dogs. To understand the complete deprivation of death we

should remember that at the time of death beggars have to leave even this old stick, the most meagre of human possessions. All over the world we can see that names carved on stone are the only possessions of the dead.

OTHER TYPES OF SUFFERING

We also have to experience the sufferings of separation, having to encounter what we do not like and not fulfilling our wishes – which include the sufferings of poverty, and of being harmed by humans and non-humans and by water, fire, wind and earth. Before the final separation at the time of death we often have to experience temporary separation from the people and things we like, which causes us mental pain. We may have to leave our country where all our friends and relatives live, or we may have to leave the job we like. We may lose our reputation. Many times in this life we have to experience the misery of departing from the people we like, or forsaking and losing the things we find pleasant and attractive; but when we die we have to part forever from all our companions and enjoyments, and from all the outer and inner conditions for our Dharma practice, of this life.

We often have to meet and live with people whom we do not like, or encounter situations that we find unpleasant. Sometimes we may find ourselves in a very dangerous situation such as in a fire or a flood, or where there is violence such as in a riot or a battle. Our lives are full of less extreme situations that we find annoying. Sometimes we are prevented from doing the things we want to do. On a sunny day we may set off for the beach but find ourselves stuck in a traffic jam. We continually experience interference from our inner demon of delusions, which disturbs our mind and our spiritual practices. There are countless conditions that frustrate our plans and prevent us from doing what we want. It is as if we are naked and living in a thorn bush – whenever we try to move, we are wounded by circumstances. People and things are like thorns piercing our flesh and no situation ever feels entirely comfortable. The more desires and plans we have, the more frustrations we experience. The more we want certain situations, the more we find ourselves stuck in situations we do not want. Every desire seems to invite its own obstacle. Undesired situations befall us without our looking for them. In fact, the only things that come effortlessly are the things we do not want. No one wants to die, but death comes effortlessly. No one wants to be sick,

but sickness comes effortlessly. Because we have taken rebirth without freedom or control, we have an impure body and inhabit an impure environment, and so undesirable things pour in upon us. In samsara, this kind of experience is entirely natural.

We have countless desires, but no matter how much effort we make we never feel that we have satisfied them. Even when we get what we want, we do not get it in the way we want. We possess the object but we do not derive satisfaction from possessing it. For example, we may dream of becoming wealthy, but if we actually become wealthy our life is not the way we imagined it would be, and we do not feel that we have fulfilled our desire. This is because our desires do not decrease as our wealth increases. The more wealth we have, the more we desire. The wealth we seek is unfindable because we seek an amount that will satiate our desires, and no amount of wealth can do that. To make things worse, in obtaining the object of our desire we create new occasions for discontent. With every object we desire come other objects we do not want. For example, with wealth come taxes, insecurity and complicated financial affairs. These unwished for accessories prevent us from ever feeling fully satisfied. Similarly, we may dream of having a holiday in the South Seas, and we may actually go there on holiday, but the experience is never quite what we expect, and with our holiday come other things such as sunburn and great expense.

If we examine our desires we shall see that they are excessive. We want all the best things in samsara – the best job, the best partner, the best reputation, the best house, the best car, the best holiday. Anything that is not the best leaves us with a feeling of disappointment – still searching for but not finding what we want. No worldly enjoyment, however, can give us the complete and perfect satisfaction we desire. Better things are always being produced. Everywhere, new advertisements announce that the very best thing has just arrived on the market, but a few days later another best thing arrives that is better than the best thing of a few days ago. There is no end of new things to captivate our desires.

Children at school can never satisfy their own or their parents' ambitions. Even if they come top of their class they feel they cannot be content unless they do the same the following year. If they go on to be successful in their jobs, their ambitions will be as strong as ever. There is no point at which they can rest, feeling that they are completely satisfied with what they have done.

We may think that at least people who lead a simple life in the country

must be content, but if we look at their situation we shall find that even farmers search for but do not find what they want. Their lives are full of problems and anxieties, and they do not enjoy real peace and satisfaction. Their livelihoods depend upon many uncertain factors beyond their control, such as the weather. Farmers have no more freedom from discontent than businessmen who live and work in the city. Businessmen look smart and efficient as they set off to work each morning carrying their briefcases but, although they look so smooth on the outside, in their hearts they carry many dissatisfactions. They are still searching for but not finding what they want.

If we reflect on this situation we may decide that we can find what we are searching for by abandoning all our possessions. We can see, however, that even poor people are looking for but not finding what they seek, and many poor people have difficulty in finding even the most basic necessities of life; millions of people in the world experience the sufferings of extreme poverty.

We cannot avoid the suffering of dissatisfaction by frequently changing our situation. We may think that if we keep getting a new partner or a new job, or keep travelling about, we shall eventually find what we want; but even if we were to travel to every place on the globe, and have a new lover in every town, we would still be seeking another place and another lover. In samsara there is no real fulfilment of our desires.

Whenever we see anyone in a high or low position, male or female, they differ only in appearance, dress, behaviour and status. In essence they are all equal – they all experience problems in their lives. Whenever we have a problem, it is easy to think that it is caused by our particular circumstances, and that if we were to change our circumstances our problem would disappear. We blame other people, our friends, our food, our government, our times, the weather, society, history and so forth. However, external circumstances such as these are not the main causes of our problems. We need to recognize that all the physical suffering and mental pain we experience are the consequences of our taking a rebirth that is contaminated by the inner poison of delusions. Human beings have to experience various kinds of human suffering because they have taken a contaminated human rebirth; animals have to experience animal suffering because they have taken a contaminated animal rebirth; and hungry ghosts and hell beings have to experience their own sufferings because they have taken contaminated rebirth as hungry ghosts and hell beings. Even gods are not free from suffering because they too have taken a contaminated rebirth. Just as a person trapped

inside a raging fire develops intense fear, so we should develop intense fear of the unbearable sufferings of the endless cycle of impure life. This fear is real renunciation and arises from our wisdom.

In conclusion, having contemplated the above explanation we should think:

There is no benefit in denying the sufferings of future lives; when they actually descend upon me it will be too late to protect myself from them. Therefore I definitely need to prepare protection now, while I have this human life that gives me the opportunity to liberate myself permanently from the sufferings of my countless future lives. If I do not apply effort to accomplish this, but allow my human life to become empty of meaning, there is no greater deception and no greater foolishness. I must put effort now into liberating myself permanently from the sufferings of my countless future lives.

We meditate on this determination continually until we develop the spontaneous wish to liberate ourselves permanently from the sufferings of countless future lives. This is the actual realization of renunciation. The moment we develop this realization we enter the path to liberation. In this context, liberation refers to the supreme permanent peace of mind known as ‘nirvana’, which gives us pure and everlasting happiness.

WHAT WE SHOULD ABANDON

In *Sutra of the Four Noble Truths* Buddha says, ‘You should abandon origins.’ In saying this Buddha is advising us that if we wish to liberate ourselves permanently from the sufferings of our countless future lives we should abandon origins. ‘Origins’ means our delusions, principally our delusion of self-grasping. Self-grasping is called an ‘origin’ because it is the source of all our suffering and problems, and is also known as the ‘inner demon’. Delusions are wrong awarenesses whose function is to destroy mental peace, the source of happiness; they have no function other than to harm us. Delusions such as self-grasping abide at our heart and continually harm us day and night without rest by destroying our peace of mind. In samsara, the cycle of impure life, no one has the opportunity to experience

real happiness because their mental peace, the source of happiness, is continually being destroyed by the inner demon of self-grasping.

Our self-grasping ignorance is a mind that mistakenly believes that our self, our body and all the other things that we normally see actually exist. Because of this ignorance we develop attachment to the things we like and anger at the things we do not like. We then perform various kinds of non-virtuous action, and as a result of these actions we experience various kinds of suffering and problems in this life and in life after life.

Self-grasping ignorance is an inner poison that causes far greater harm than any outer poison. Because of being polluted by this inner poison, our mind sees everything in a mistaken way, and as a result we experience hallucination-like sufferings and problems. In reality, our self, our body and all the other things that we normally see do not exist. Self-grasping can be likened to a poisonous tree, all other delusions to its branches, and all our suffering and problems to its fruit; it is the fundamental source of all our other delusions and of all our suffering and problems. Through this we can understand that if we abandon our self-grasping permanently, all our suffering and problems of this life and of countless future lives will cease permanently. The great Yogi Saraha said: 'If your mind is released permanently from self-grasping, there is no doubt that you will be released permanently from suffering.' Understanding this and having contemplated the above explanations, we should think:

I must apply great effort to recognizing, reducing and finally abandoning my ignorance of self-grasping completely.

We should meditate on this determination continually, and put our determination into practice.

WHAT WE SHOULD PRACTISE

In *Sutra of the Four Noble Truths* Buddha says, 'You should practise the path.' In this context, 'path' does not mean an external path that leads from one place to another, but an inner path, a spiritual realization that leads us to the pure happiness of liberation and enlightenment.

The practice of the stages of the path to liberation can be condensed into

the three trainings of higher moral discipline, higher concentration and higher wisdom. These trainings are called 'higher' because they are motivated by renunciation. They are therefore the actual path to liberation that we need to practise.

The nature of moral discipline is a virtuous determination to abandon inappropriate actions. When we practise moral discipline we abandon inappropriate actions, maintain pure behaviour and perform every action correctly with a virtuous motivation. Moral discipline is most important for everybody in order to prevent future problems for ourself and for others. It makes us pure because it makes our actions pure. We need to be clean and pure ourself; just having a clean body is not enough, since our body is not our self. Moral discipline is like a great earth that supports and nurtures the crops of spiritual realizations. Without practising moral discipline, it is very difficult to make progress in spiritual training. Training in higher moral discipline is learning to be deeply familiar with the practice of moral discipline, motivated by renunciation.

The second higher training is training in higher concentration. The nature of concentration is a single-pointed virtuous mind. For as long as we remain with this mind we shall experience mental peace, and thus we shall be happy. When we practise concentration we prevent distractions and concentrate on virtuous objects. It is very important to train in concentration, as with distractions we cannot accomplish anything. Training in higher concentration is learning to be deeply familiar with the ability to stop distractions and concentrate on virtuous objects, with a motivation of renunciation. With regard to any Dharma practice, if our concentration is clear and strong it is very easy to make progress. Normally, distraction is the main obstacle to our Dharma practice. The practice of moral discipline prevents gross distractions, and concentration prevents subtle distractions; together they give rise to quick results in our Dharma practice.

The third higher training is training in higher wisdom. The nature of wisdom is a virtuous intelligent mind that functions to understand meaningful objects such as the existence of past and future lives, karma and emptiness. Understanding these objects brings great meaning to this life and countless future lives. Many people are very intelligent in destroying their enemies, caring for their families, finding what they want and so forth, but this is not wisdom. Even animals have such intelligence. Worldly intelligence is deceptive, whereas wisdom will never deceive us. It is our inner Spiritual

Guide who leads us to correct paths, and it is the divine eye through which we can see past and future lives, and the special connection between our actions in past lives and our experiences in this life, known as 'karma'. The subject of karma is very extensive and subtle, and we can understand it only through wisdom. Training in higher wisdom is learning to develop and increase our wisdom realizing emptiness through contemplating and meditating on emptiness, with a motivation of renunciation. This wisdom is extremely profound. Its object, emptiness, is not nothingness but is the real nature of all phenomena. A detailed explanation of emptiness is given in the chapter *Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta*.

The three higher trainings are the actual method to attain permanent liberation from the suffering of this life and countless future lives. This can be understood by the following analogy. When we cut down a tree using a saw, the saw alone cannot cut the tree without the use of our hands, which in turn depend upon our body. Training in higher moral discipline is like our body, training in higher concentration is like our hands, and training in higher wisdom is like the saw. By using these three together, we can cut down the poisonous tree of our self-grasping ignorance, and automatically all other delusions – its branches – and all our suffering and problems – its fruits – will cease completely. Then we shall have attained the permanent cessation of the suffering of this life and future lives – the supreme permanent peace of mind known as 'nirvana', or liberation. We shall have solved all our human problems and accomplished the real meaning of our life.

Contemplating the above explanation we should think:

Since the three higher trainings are the actual method to attain permanent liberation from the suffering of this life and countless future lives, I must put great effort into practising them.

We should meditate on this determination continually, and put our determination into practice.

WHAT WE SHOULD ATTAIN

In *Sutra of the Four Noble Truths* Buddha says, 'You should attain cessations.' In this context, 'cessation' means the permanent cessation of

suffering and its root, self-grasping ignorance. In saying this, Buddha is advising us not to be satisfied with a temporary liberation from particular sufferings, but that we should have the intention to accomplish the ultimate goal of human life, the supreme permanent peace of mind (nirvana), and the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment.

Every living being without exception has to experience the cycle of the sufferings of sickness, ageing, death and rebirth, in life after life, endlessly. Following Buddha's example, we should develop strong renunciation for this endless cycle. When he was living in the palace with his family, Buddha saw how his people were constantly experiencing these sufferings and he made the strong determination to attain enlightenment, great liberation, and to lead every living being to this state.

Buddha did not encourage us to abandon daily activities that provide necessary conditions for living, or that prevent poverty, environmental problems, particular diseases and so forth. However, no matter how successful we are in these activities, we shall never achieve permanent cessation of such problems. We shall still have to experience them in our countless future lives and, even in this life, although we work very hard to prevent these problems, the sufferings of poverty, environmental pollution and disease are increasing throughout the world. Furthermore, because of the power of modern technology there are now many great dangers developing in the world that have never been experienced before. Therefore, we should not be satisfied with merely temporary freedom from particular sufferings, but apply great effort to attaining permanent freedom while we have this opportunity.

We should remember the preciousness of our human life. Because of their previous deluded views denying the value of spiritual practice, those who have taken rebirth as animals, for example, have no opportunity to engage in spiritual practice, which alone gives rise to a meaningful life. Since it is impossible for them to listen to, understand, contemplate and meditate on spiritual instructions, their present animal rebirth itself is an obstacle. As mentioned earlier, only human beings are free from such obstacles and have all the necessary conditions for engaging in spiritual paths, which alone lead to everlasting peace and happiness. This combination of freedom and the possession of necessary conditions is the special characteristic that makes our human life so precious.

In conclusion, we should think:

I should not be satisfied with a merely temporary cessation of particular sufferings, which even animals can experience. I must attain the permanent cessation of self-grasping ignorance – the root of suffering – through sincerely practising the three higher trainings.

We should meditate on this determination every day, and put our determination into practice. In this way we guide ourself to the liberating path.

The Path of a Person of Great Scope

In this context, a ‘person of great scope’ refers to someone who has a great capacity for developing spiritual understanding and realizations.

Because this subject is extensive and profound, containing both Sutra and Tantra, a detailed explanation of it will be given in the remaining chapters of this volume, and in *Modern Buddhism – Volume 2: Tantra*.



Je Tsongkhapa

The Supreme Good Heart – Bodhichitta

We should maintain renunciation – the sincere wish to attain permanent liberation – day and night. It is the door to liberation – the supreme permanent peace of mind – and the basis of more advanced realizations. However, we should not be content with seeking merely our own liberation; we need also to consider the welfare of other living beings. There are countless beings drowning in samsara’s ocean experiencing unbearable suffering. Whereas each one of us is just one single person, other living beings are countless in number; therefore the happiness and freedom of others are much more important than our own. For this reason we must enter the Bodhisattva’s path, which leads us to the state of full enlightenment.

The gateway through which we enter the Bodhisattva’s path is bodhichitta. ‘Bodhi’ means enlightenment and ‘chitta’ means mind. Bodhichitta is a mind that spontaneously wishes to attain enlightenment to benefit each and every living being directly. The moment we develop this precious mind of bodhichitta we become a Bodhisattva – a person who spontaneously wishes to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings – and we become a Son or Daughter of the Conqueror Buddhas.

This supreme good heart of bodhichitta cannot be developed without training. Je Tsongkhapa said:

Through watering the ground of affectionate love with cherishing love,
And then sowing the seeds of wishing love and compassion,
The medicinal tree of bodhichitta will grow.

This implies that there are five stages of training in bodhichitta: 1. training in affectionate love; 2. training in cherishing love; 3. training in wishing love; 4. training in universal compassion; and 5. training in actual bodhichitta.

TRAINING IN AFFECTIONATE LOVE

In this training we learn to develop and maintain a warm heart and a feeling of being close to all living beings without exception. This affectionate love makes our mind pure and balanced, and prepares the foundation for generating cherishing love for all living beings. Normally our mind is unbalanced; we feel either too close to someone out of attachment or too distant from others out of anger. It is impossible to develop the supreme good heart of bodhichitta with such an unbalanced mind. This unbalanced mind is the source of all our daily problems. We may think that some people are our enemies because they are harming us, so how can we develop and maintain a warm heart and a feeling of being close to such people? This way of thinking is incorrect. The people who we believe are our enemies are in reality our mothers of former lives. Our mothers of former lives and our mother of this present life are all our mothers and are all equally kind to us.

It is incorrect to reason that our mothers of former lives are no longer our mothers just because a long time has passed since they actually cared for us. If our present mother were to die today, would she cease to be our mother? No, we would still regard her as our mother and pray for her happiness. The same is true of all our previous mothers – they died, yet they remain our mothers. It is only because of the changes in our external appearance that we do not recognize each other.

In our daily life, we see many different living beings, both human and non-human. We regard some as friends, some as enemies, and most as strangers. These distinctions are made by our mistaken minds; they are not verified by valid minds. Rather than following such mistaken minds, we should recognize and believe that all living beings are our mothers. Whoever we meet, we should think ‘This person is my mother.’ In this way, we shall generate a warm heart and a feeling of being equally close to all living beings. Our belief that all living beings are our mothers is wisdom because it understands a meaningful object, which is that all living beings are our mothers. Through this understanding we shall experience great meaning in this life and in countless future lives. We should never abandon this beneficial belief or view.

We should contemplate as follows:

Since it is impossible to find a beginning to my mental continuum, it follows that I have taken countless rebirths in the past, and, if I have had countless rebirths, I must have had countless mothers. Where are all these

mothers now? They are all the living beings alive today.

Having repeatedly contemplated this point we strongly believe that all living beings are our mothers, and we meditate on this belief.

THE KINDNESS OF LIVING BEINGS

Having become convinced that all living beings are our mothers, we contemplate the immense kindness we have received from each of them when they were our mother, as well as the kindness they have shown us at other times.

When we were conceived, had our mother not wanted to keep us in her womb she could have had an abortion. If she had done so, we would not now have this human life. Through her kindness she allowed us to stay in her womb, and so we now enjoy a human life and experience all its advantages. When we were a baby, had we not received her constant care and attention we would certainly have had an accident and could now be disabled or blind. Fortunately, our mother did not neglect us. Day and night, she gave us her loving care, regarding us as more important than herself. She saved our life many times each day. During the night she allowed her sleep to be interrupted, and during the day she forfeited her usual pleasures. She had to leave her job, and when her friends went out to enjoy themselves she had to stay behind. She spent all her money on us, giving us the best food and the best clothes she could afford. She taught us how to eat, how to walk, how to talk. Thinking of our future welfare, she did her best to ensure that we received a good education. Due to her kindness, we are now able to study whatever we choose. It is principally through the kindness of our mother that we now have the opportunity to practise Dharma and eventually to attain enlightenment.

Since there is no one who has not been our mother at some time in our previous lives, and since when we were their child they treated us with the same kindness as our present mother has treated us in this life, all living beings are very kind.

The kindness of living beings is not limited to the times when they have been our mother. All the time, our day-to-day needs are provided through the kindness of others. We brought nothing with us from our former life, yet, as

soon as we were born, we were given a home, food, clothes, and everything we needed – all provided through the kindness of others. Everything we now enjoy has been provided through the kindness of other beings, past or present.

We are able to make use of many things with very little effort on our own part. If we consider facilities such as roads, cars, trains, aeroplanes, ships, houses, restaurants, hotels, libraries, hospitals, shops, money and so on, it is clear that many people worked very hard to provide these things. Even though we make little or no contribution towards the provision of these facilities, they are all available for us to use. This shows the great kindness of others.

Both our general education and our spiritual training are provided by others. All our Dharma realizations, from our very first insights up to our eventual attainment of liberation and enlightenment, will be attained in dependence upon the kindness of others. As human beings we generally have the opportunity to attain the supreme happiness of enlightenment. This is because we have the opportunity to enter and follow the path to enlightenment, a spiritual path motivated by compassion for all living beings. The gateway through which we enter the path to enlightenment is therefore compassion for all living beings – universal compassion – and we develop this compassion only by relying upon all living beings as the objects of our compassion. This shows that it is through the great kindness of all living beings acting as the objects of our compassion that we have the opportunity to enter the path to enlightenment and attain the supreme happiness of enlightenment. It is therefore clear that for us all living beings are supremely kind and precious.

From the depths of our heart we should think:

Each and every living being is supremely kind and precious to me. They provide me with the opportunity to attain the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment – the ultimate goal of human life.

Understanding and thinking in this way, we generate a warm heart and a feeling of being equally close to all living beings without exception. We transform our mind into this feeling, and we remain on it single-pointedly for as long as possible. Through continually contemplating and meditating in this way we shall maintain a warm heart and a feeling of being close to each and every living being all the time, in every situation. Having understood the

eight benefits of maintaining affectionate love that are listed below in the section *Wishing Love*, we should apply continual effort in this practice.

TRAINING IN CHERISHING LOVE

This training has two stages: 1. equalizing self and others; and 2. exchanging self with others.

EQUALIZING SELF AND OTHERS

This practice is called ‘equalizing self and others’ because we are learning to believe that the happiness and freedom of ourself and all other living beings are equally important. Learning to cherish others is the best solution to our daily problems, and it is the source of all our future happiness and good fortune.

There are two levels of cherishing others: (1) cherishing others as we cherish a close friend or relative; and (2) cherishing others as we cherish ourself. The second level is more profound. Through cherishing all living beings as we cherish ourself we shall develop the profound universal compassion that functions as the quick path to enlightenment. This is one of the essential points of Kadam Lamrim.

To train in equalizing self and others we engage in the following contemplation, thinking:

I must believe that the happiness and freedom of myself and all other living beings are equally important because:

(1) All living beings have shown me great kindness in both this and previous lives.

(2) Just as I wish to be free from suffering and experience only happiness, so do all other beings. In this respect, I am no different from any other being; we are all equal.

(3) I am only one, whereas others are countless, so how can I be concerned for myself alone while I neglect others? My happiness and suffering are insignificant when compared with the happiness and suffering of countless other living beings.

Having repeatedly contemplated these points, we strongly believe that the happiness and freedom of ourself and all other living beings are equally important. We then remain on this belief single-pointedly for as long as possible. We should continually practise this contemplation and meditation until we spontaneously believe that the happiness and freedom of ourself and all other living beings are equally important, which is the realization of equalizing self and others.

EXCHANGING SELF WITH OTHERS

This training has three stages: 1. contemplating the disadvantages of self-cherishing; 2. contemplating the advantages of cherishing others; and 3. the actual training in exchanging self with others.

CONTEMPLATING THE DISADVANTAGES OF SELF-CHERISHING

What exactly is self-cherishing? Self-cherishing is our mind that thinks ‘I am important’ while neglecting others. When we think ‘I’ and ‘mine’ we perceive an inherently existent I, and we cherish it and believe that its happiness and freedom are the most important. This is self-cherishing. Caring for ourself is not self-cherishing. We need to care for ourself to maintain this human life so that we can continually apply effort to accomplishing its real meaning.

Self-cherishing and self-grasping are different aspects of one mind. Self-grasping grasps at an inherently existent ‘I’, and self-cherishing believes that such an ‘I’ is precious and that its happiness and freedom are supremely important. Self-cherishing is our normal view that believes ‘I am important’ and ‘My happiness and freedom are important’, and that neglects others’ happiness and freedom. It is part of our ignorance because in reality there is no inherently existent I. Our self-cherishing mind nevertheless cherishes this I and believes it to be the most important. It is a foolish and deceptive mind that always interferes with our inner peace, and it is a great obstacle to our accomplishing the real meaning of our human life. We have had this self-cherishing mind in life after life since beginningless time, even while asleep

and dreaming.

In *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says:

... all the suffering there is in this world
Arises from wishing ourself to be happy.

Sufferings are not given to us as a punishment. They all come from our self-cherishing mind, which wishes ourself to be happy while neglecting the happiness of others. There are two ways to understand this. First, the self-cherishing mind is the creator of all our suffering and problems; and second, self-cherishing is the basis for experiencing all our suffering and problems.

We suffer because in our previous lives we performed actions that caused others to experience suffering, motivated by selfish intention – our self-cherishing. As a result of these actions, we now experience our present suffering and problems. Therefore, the real creator of all our suffering and problems is our self-cherishing mind.

Our present experience of particular suffering and problems has a special connection with particular actions we performed in our previous lives. This is very subtle. We cannot see this hidden connection with our eyes, but as already explained we can understand it through using our wisdom, and in particular through relying upon Buddha's teachings on karma. In general, everyone knows that if they perform bad actions they will experience bad results and if they perform good actions they will experience good results.

The self-cherishing mind is also the basis for experiencing all our suffering and problems. For example, when people are unable to fulfil their wishes, many experience depression, discouragement, unhappiness and mental pain, and some even want to kill themselves. This is because their self-cherishing believes that their own wishes are so important. It is therefore their self-cherishing that is mainly responsible for their problems. Without self-cherishing, there would be no basis for experiencing such suffering.

When we are seriously ill we find it difficult to bear our suffering, but illness harms us only because we cherish ourself. If another person is experiencing a similar illness, we have no problem. Why? Because we do not cherish him or her. However, if we cherished others as we cherish ourself, we would find it difficult to bear their suffering. This is compassion. As Shantideva says:

The suffering I experience
Does not harm others,
But I find it hard to bear
Because I cherish myself.

Likewise, the suffering of others
Does not harm me,
But, if I cherish others,
I shall find their suffering hard to bear.

In life after life, since beginningless time, we have tried to fulfil the wishes of our self-cherishing mind, believing its view to be true. We have put great effort into seeking happiness from external sources, but have nothing to show for it now. Because self-cherishing has deceived us we have wasted countless previous lives. It has driven us to work for our own purpose, but we have gained nothing. This foolish mind has made all our previous lives empty – when we took this human rebirth we brought nothing with us but delusions. In every moment of every day, this self-cherishing mind continues to deceive us.

Having contemplated these points, we think:

Nothing causes me greater harm than the demon of my self-cherishing. It is the source of all my negativity, misfortune, problems and suffering. Therefore I must abandon my self-cherishing.

We should meditate on this determination every day, and put our determination into practice.

CONTEMPLATING THE ADVANTAGES OF CHERISHING OTHERS

When we deeply think that others are important, and that their happiness and freedom are important, we are cherishing others. If we cherish others like this, we shall always have good relationships and live in harmony with others, and our daily life will be peaceful and happy. We can begin this practice with our family, friends and those around us, and then gradually we

shall develop and maintain cherishing love for all living beings without exception.

In *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva says:

All the happiness there is in this world
Arises from wishing others to be happy

If we think carefully about this, we shall realize that all our present and future happiness depends upon our cherishing others – upon our wanting others to be happy. In our past lives, because we cherished others, we practised virtuous actions such as refraining from killing or harming others and abandoning stealing from and cheating them. We gave them material help and protection, and practised patience. As a result of these virtuous actions, we have now obtained this precious human life with the opportunity to experience human enjoyments.

The immediate effect of cherishing others will be that many of our daily problems, such as those that arise from anger, jealousy and selfish behaviour, will disappear, and our mind will become calm and peaceful. Since we shall act in considerate ways, we shall please others and not become involved in quarrels or disputes. If we cherish others we shall be concerned to help rather than to harm them, so we shall naturally avoid non-virtuous actions. Instead, we shall practise virtuous actions, such as compassion, love, patience, and giving material help and protection, and thus create the cause to attain pure and everlasting happiness in the future.

In particular, if we cherish all other living beings as we cherish ourselves we shall find their suffering hard to bear. Our feeling that it is hard to bear the suffering of all other living beings is universal compassion, and this will lead us quickly to the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment. Just like all the previous Buddhas, we shall be born an enlightened Buddha from the mother, universal compassion. This is why our cherishing all living beings will enable us to attain enlightenment very quickly.

Contemplating all these benefits, we think:

The precious mind that cherishes all living beings protects both myself and others from suffering, brings pure and everlasting happiness and fulfils the wishes of both myself and others. Therefore I must always cherish all living beings without exception.

We should meditate on this determination every day, and out of meditation put our determination into practice. This means that we should actually cherish each and every living being, including animals.

THE ACTUAL TRAINING IN EXCHANGING SELF WITH OTHERS

Exchanging self with others means that we change the object of our cherishing from ourself to all other living beings. This is impossible without training. How do we train in exchanging self with others? With an understanding of the great disadvantages of cherishing ourself and the great advantages of cherishing all living beings, as explained above, and remembering that we have made the determination to abandon our self-cherishing and always cherish all living beings without exception, we think from the depths of our heart:

I must give up cherishing myself and instead cherish all other living beings without exception.

We then meditate on this determination. We should continually practise this meditation until we spontaneously believe that the happiness and freedom of each and every other living being are far more important than our own. This belief is the realization of exchanging self with others.

TRAINING IN WISHING LOVE

With the understanding and belief that the happiness and freedom of each and every living being are far more important than our own, we generate wishing love for all living beings, thinking:

How wonderful it would be if all living beings attained the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment! May they attain this happiness. I myself will work for this aim.

We remain single-pointedly on this precious mind of wishing love for all

living beings for as long as possible. We repeat this meditation again and again until we spontaneously wish that each and every living being may experience the happiness of enlightenment. This spontaneous wish is the actual realization of wishing love.

Wishing love is also called ‘immeasurable love’ because merely through meditating on wishing love we shall receive immeasurable benefits in this life and in countless future lives. Based on Buddha’s teachings, the great scholar Nagarjuna listed eight benefits of affectionate love and wishing love: (1) By meditating on affectionate love and wishing love for just one moment we accumulate greater merit than we would do by giving food three times every day to all those who are hungry in the world.

When we give food to those who are hungry we are not giving real happiness. This is because the happiness that comes from eating food is not real happiness, but just a temporary reduction in the suffering of hunger. However, meditation on affectionate love and wishing love leads us and all living beings to the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment.

The remaining seven benefits of meditating on affectionate love and wishing love are that in the future: (2) we shall receive great loving kindness from humans and non-humans; (3) we shall be protected in various ways by humans and non-humans; (4) we shall be mentally happy all the time; (5) we shall be physically healthy all the time; (6) we shall not be harmed by weapons, poison and other harmful conditions; (7) we shall obtain all necessary conditions without effort; and (8) we shall be born in the superior heaven of a Buddha Land.

Having contemplated these benefits we should apply effort in meditating on wishing love many times every day.

TRAINING IN UNIVERSAL COMPASSION

Universal compassion is a mind that sincerely wishes to liberate all living beings from suffering permanently. If, on the basis of cherishing all living beings, we contemplate the fact that they experience the cycle of physical suffering and mental pain in life after life without end, their inability to liberate themselves from suffering, their lack of freedom and how, by engaging in negative actions, they create the causes of future suffering, we shall develop deep compassion for them. We need to empathize with them

and feel their pain as keenly as we feel our own.

No one wants to suffer, yet out of ignorance living beings create suffering by performing non-virtuous actions. We should therefore feel equal compassion for all living beings without exception; there is no single living being who is not a suitable object of our compassion.

All living beings suffer because they take contaminated rebirths. Human beings have no choice but to experience immense human sufferings because they have taken human rebirth, which is contaminated by the inner poison of delusions. Similarly, animals have to experience animal suffering, and hungry ghosts and hell beings have to experience all the sufferings of their respective realms. If living beings were to experience all this suffering for just one single life, it would not be so bad, but the cycle of suffering continues life after life, endlessly.

To develop renunciation, we previously contemplated how in our countless future lives we shall have to experience the unbearable sufferings of animals, hungry ghosts, hell beings, humans, demi-gods and gods. Now, at this point, to develop compassion for all living beings who are our mothers, we contemplate how in their countless future lives they will have to experience the unbearable sufferings of animals, hungry ghosts, hell beings, humans, demi-gods and gods.

Having contemplated this we should think:

I cannot bear the suffering of these countless mother beings. Drowning in the vast and deep ocean of samsara, the cycle of contaminated rebirth, they have to experience unbearable physical suffering and mental pain in this life and in countless future lives. I must permanently liberate all these living beings from their suffering.

We should meditate continually on this determination, which is universal compassion, and apply great effort to fulfilling its aim.

TRAINING IN ACTUAL BODHICHTTA

The moment we develop bodhichitta we become a Bodhisattva, a person who spontaneously wishes to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings. Initially we shall be a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation. Then,

by following the path to enlightenment with the vehicle of bodhichitta, we can progress from being a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation to being a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation, a Bodhisattva on the path of seeing, and then a Bodhisattva on the path of meditation. From there we shall reach the Path of No More Learning, which is the actual state of enlightenment. As already mentioned, enlightenment is the inner light of wisdom that is permanently free from all mistaken appearance, and whose function is to bestow mental peace upon each and every living being every day. When we attain a Buddha's enlightenment we shall be able to benefit each and every living being directly through bestowing blessings and through our countless emanations.

In Sutra teachings, Buddha says:

In this impure life of samsara
No one experiences real happiness;
The actions they perform
Will always be the causes of suffering.

The happiness that we normally experience through having good conditions, such as a good reputation, a good position, a good job, good relationships, seeing attractive forms, hearing good news or beautiful music, eating, drinking and sex is not real happiness, but changing suffering – a reduction in our previous suffering. Out of ignorance, however, we believe that only these things bring happiness, and because of this we never wish to attain real happiness, the pure and everlasting happiness of liberation and enlightenment, even for our own benefit. We are always searching for happiness in this impure life of samsara, like the thief who searched for gold in Milarepa's empty cave and found nothing. The great Yogi Milarepa heard a thief rummaging around his cave one night and called out to him, 'How do you expect to find anything valuable here at night, when I cannot find anything valuable here during the day?'

When, through training, we develop the precious mind of enlightenment, bodhichitta, we spontaneously think:

How wonderful it would be if I and all living beings attained real happiness, the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment! May we attain this happiness. I myself will work for this aim.

We need to have this precious mind of bodhichitta in our heart. It is our inner Spiritual Guide, who leads us directly to the state of supreme happiness of enlightenment; and it is the real wishfulfilling jewel through which we can fulfil our own and others' wishes. There is no greater beneficial intention than this precious mind.

Having contemplated the above explanation, we think from the depths of our heart:

I am one single person but other living beings are countless, and they are all my kind mothers. These countless mother beings have to experience unbearable physical suffering and mental pain in this life and in their countless future lives. Compared with the suffering of these countless living beings, my own suffering is insignificant. I must liberate all living beings from suffering permanently, and for this purpose I must attain a Buddha's enlightenment.

We meditate on this determination, which is bodhichitta, single-pointedly. We should practise this contemplation and meditation continually until we develop the spontaneous wish to attain enlightenment to benefit each and every living being directly, and then we should apply great effort to fulfilling our bodhichitta wish.

Training in the Path of Bodhichitta

There are three stages of training in the path of bodhichitta: 1. training in the six perfections; 2. training in taking in conjunction with the practice of the six perfections; and 3. training in giving in conjunction with the practice of the six perfections.

TRAINING IN THE SIX PERFECTIONS

The six perfections are the actual path to enlightenment, and they are also the path of bodhichitta and the Bodhisattva's path. Through following this path with the vehicle of bodhichitta we shall definitely reach the state of enlightenment. Our bodhichitta wish is to attain enlightenment to benefit each and every living being directly. To fulfil this wish, in front of our Spiritual Guide or an image of Buddha regarded as the living Buddha, we should promise to engage in the Bodhisattva's path or training while reciting the following ritual prayer three times. This promise is the Bodhisattva's vow.

Just as all the previous Sugatas, the Buddhas,
Generated the mind of enlightenment, bodhichitta,
And accomplished all the stages
Of the Bodhisattva's training,

So will I too, for the sake of all beings,
Generate the mind of enlightenment
And accomplish all the stages
Of the Bodhisattva's training.

When we take the Bodhisattva's vow we are taking the commitment to engage in the path to enlightenment, the Bodhisattva's training, which is the practice of the six perfections. Normally, when we start a job, we commit ourself to fulfilling our employer's wishes; otherwise we shall quickly lose our job. In the same way, having generated bodhichitta – the determination to attain enlightenment to benefit each and every living being directly – we need

to commit myself to engaging in the practice of the six perfections. If we do not make this commitment by taking the Bodhisattva's vow, we shall lose our opportunity to attain enlightenment. Through contemplating this we should encourage ourselves to take the Bodhisattva's vow and sincerely practise the six perfections.

The six perfections are the practices of giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom, motivated by bodhichitta. We should recognize that the six perfections are our daily practice.

In the practice of giving we should practise: (1) giving material help to those in poverty, including giving food to animals; (2) giving practical help to those sick or physically weak; (3) giving protection by always trying to save others' lives, including those of insects; (4) giving love – learning to cherish all living beings by always believing that their happiness and freedom are important; and (5) giving Dharma, helping others to solve their problems of anger, attachment and ignorance by giving Dharma teachings or meaningful advice.

In the practice of moral discipline we should abandon any inappropriate actions including those that cause others suffering. We should especially abandon breaking our commitments of the Bodhisattva's vow. This is the basic foundation upon which we can make progress on the Bodhisattva's path. By doing this our actions of body, speech and mind will be pure, so that we become a pure being.

In the practice of patience we should never allow ourselves to become angry or discouraged, by temporarily accepting any difficulties or harm from others. When we practise patience we are wearing the supreme inner armour that directly protects us from physical sufferings, mental pain and other problems. Anger destroys our merit, or good fortune, so that we shall continually experience many obstacles, and because of lacking good fortune it will be difficult to fulfil our wishes, especially our spiritual aims. There is no greater evil than anger. With the practice of patience we can accomplish any spiritual aim; there is no greater virtue than patience.

In the practice of effort we should rely upon irreversible effort to accumulate the great collections of merit and wisdom, which are the main causes of attaining Buddha's Form Body (Rupakaya), and Truth Body (Dharmakaya); and especially we should emphasize contemplation and meditation on emptiness, the way things really are. By doing this we can easily make progress on the path to enlightenment. With effort we can

accomplish our aim, whereas with laziness we cannot achieve anything.

In the practice of concentration, at this stage we should emphasize accomplishing the concentration of tranquil abiding observing emptiness. An explanation is given below in the section *A Simple Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta*. When, through the power of this concentration, we experience a special wisdom called ‘superior seeing’ that realizes the emptiness of all phenomena very clearly, we shall have progressed from being a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation to being a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation.

In the practice of wisdom, at this stage we need to emphasize increasing the power of our wisdom of superior seeing by continually meditating on the emptiness of all phenomena with bodhichitta motivation. Through this, when our superior seeing transforms into the path of seeing, which is the direct realization of the emptiness of all phenomena, we shall have progressed from being a Bodhisattva on the path of preparation to being a Bodhisattva on the path of seeing. The moment we attain the path of seeing we are a Superior Bodhisattva and no longer experience samsara’s sufferings. Even if someone cuts our body piece by piece with a knife we have no pain because we have the direct realization of the way things really are.

Having completed the path of seeing, to make further progress we need to engage continually in the meditation on the emptiness of all phenomena with bodhichitta motivation. This meditation is called the ‘path of meditation’. When we reach this stage we shall have progressed from being a Bodhisattva on the path of seeing to being a Bodhisattva on the path of meditation.

Having completed the path of meditation, when our wisdom of the path of meditation transforms into an omniscient wisdom that is permanently free from all mistaken appearances, this omniscient wisdom is called the ‘Path of No More Learning’, which is actual enlightenment. When we reach this stage we shall have progressed from being a Bodhisattva on the path of meditation to being an enlightened being, a Buddha. We shall have completed the ultimate goal of living beings.

The Bodhisattva’s initial training in accumulating merit or wisdom is the Bodhisattva’s path of accumulation; the Bodhisattva’s training in accumulating merit or wisdom that is a preparation for attaining the path of seeing is the Bodhisattva’s path of preparation; the Bodhisattva’s training that is the initial direct realization of emptiness is the Bodhisattva’s path of seeing; after completing the path of seeing the Bodhisattva’s training that

meditates continually on emptiness is the Bodhisattva's path of meditation; and Buddha's omniscient wisdom that is attained through completing all the trainings of Sutra and Tantra is the Path of No More Learning, the state of enlightenment.

TRAINING IN TAKING IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE PRACTICE OF THE SIX PERFECTIONS

There are four main benefits of the meditations on taking and giving: they are powerful methods (1) to purify the potentialities of non-virtuous actions that cause us to experience serious diseases such as cancer; (2) to accumulate a great collection of merit; (3) to ripen our potentiality to be able to benefit all living beings; and (4) to purify our mind.

There was once a Lamrim practitioner called Kharak Gomchen who was seriously afflicted by leprosy. The treatments given by his doctors did not work, and each year his condition grew worse. Finally, his doctors told him that there was nothing they could do to cure his disease. Believing that he would soon die, Gomchen left his home and went to a cemetery to prepare for death. While staying in the cemetery, he concentrated day and night on practising the meditations on taking and giving with strong compassion for all living beings. Through this practice he was completely cured and returned home healthy and with a happy mind. There are many other similar examples.

At the moment we are unable to benefit all living beings but we have the potential for this ability, which is part of our Buddha nature. Through practising the meditations on taking and giving with strong compassion for all living beings, the potential to be able to benefit all living beings will ripen, and when this happens we shall become an enlightened being, a Buddha. When we purify our mind through the practices of taking and giving, every spiritual realization will grow easily in our mind. Through contemplating the four main benefits of meditating on taking and giving, we should encourage ourselves to practise these meditations sincerely.

'Taking' in this context means taking others' sufferings upon oneself through meditation. When we meditate on taking our motivation should be compassion, thinking:

I must permanently liberate all living beings from their suffering and fears in this life and countless future lives.

In this way, by giving protection we are practising the perfection of giving; by abandoning self-cherishing we are practising the perfection of moral discipline; by willingly accepting any adverse conditions obstructing our practice of taking we are practising the perfection of patience; by applying effort to practising this meditation continually, free from laziness, we are practising the perfection of effort; by concentrating single-pointedly on the meditation on taking, free from distraction, we are practising the perfection of concentration; and by realizing that we ourselves, all living beings, and their suffering all exist as mere names and do not inherently exist we are practising the perfection of wisdom. This is how we should train in the meditation on taking in conjunction with practising the six perfections. This is a very profound method of practising the six perfections. We should apply this same method to all other meditations, such as the meditation on death, so that we can quickly make progress along the path to enlightenment.

There are two stages to the meditation on taking: 1. meditation on taking focusing on all living beings; and 2. meditation on taking focusing on particular living beings.

MEDITATION ON TAKING FOCUSING ON ALL LIVING BEINGS

In this first stage we focus on the assembly of all living beings without exception, and then think from the depths of our heart:

In their countless future lives these living beings will continually experience without choice the sufferings of humans, animals, hungry ghosts, hell beings, demi-gods and gods. How wonderful it would be if all these living beings were permanently freed from the suffering and fears in this life and countless future lives! May they achieve this. I myself will work for them to achieve this. I must do this.

Thinking in this way, we imagine that the sufferings of all living beings gather together in the aspect of black smoke. This dissolves into our

ignorance of self-grasping and self-cherishing at our heart. We then strongly believe that all living beings are permanently freed from suffering, and that our ignorance of self-grasping and self-cherishing is completely destroyed. We meditate on this belief single-pointedly for as long as possible.

With compassion for all living beings we should continually practise this meditation until we experience signs that indicate our mind has been purified. These signs can include the curing of any sickness we may have, the reducing of our delusions, our having a more peaceful and happy mind, the increasing of our faith, correct intention and correct view, and especially the strengthening of our experience of universal compassion.

MEDITATION ON TAKING FOCUSING ON PARTICULAR LIVING BEINGS

In this meditation we can focus, for example, on the assembly of living beings who experience the suffering of sickness. We then think:

These living beings experience the suffering of sickness in this life and in their countless future lives without end. How wonderful it would be if these living beings were permanently freed from sickness! May they achieve this. I myself will work for them to achieve this. I must do this.

Thinking in this way, we imagine that the suffering of sickness of all living beings gathers together in the aspect of black smoke. This dissolves into our ignorance of self-grasping and self-cherishing at our heart. We then strongly believe that all these living beings are permanently freed from sickness, and that our ignorance of self-grasping and self-cherishing is completely destroyed. We meditate on this belief single-pointedly for as long as possible.

In the same way, we can practise the meditation on taking while focusing on a particular individual or group of living beings who are experiencing other sufferings such as poverty, fighting and famine.

We should apply particular effort to developing deep familiarity with the meditation on taking focusing on all living beings. This meditation makes our mind pure, which in turn makes our actions pure so that we become a pure being. If we die with strong compassion for all living beings we shall

definitely be born in the Pure Land of a Buddha. This is because our compassion that manifests when we are dying will directly cause our potential for taking rebirth in the Pure Land of a Buddha to ripen. This is the good result of a good heart. The result of maintaining the good heart of sincerely wishing to liberate permanently all living beings from suffering is that we ourselves shall experience permanent liberation from suffering by taking rebirth in the Pure Land of a Buddha.

For example, when Geshe Chekhawa was dying he developed the sincere wish to be reborn in hell in order to help hell beings directly, but he received clear visions that he would be reborn in Sukhavati, the Pure Land of Buddha Amitabha. He told his assistant 'Unfortunately my wish will not be fulfilled.' The assistant asked him 'What is your wish?', and Geshe Chekhawa replied, 'My wish is to take rebirth in hell so that I can help hell beings directly, but I have seen clear signs that I shall be born in the Pure Land of Buddha Amitabha.' Although Geshe Chekhawa wanted to take rebirth in hell, his compassion for all living beings prevented him from taking a lower rebirth; he had no choice but to go to a Buddha's Pure Land where he experienced permanent liberation from suffering. However, although Geshe Chekhawa took rebirth in a Pure Land, he was able to help hell beings through his emanations.

We may think our belief that living beings have attained permanent liberation from suffering through our meditation is incorrect, because living beings have not actually attained this. Although it is true that living beings have not actually attained permanent liberation, our belief is still correct because it arises from our compassion and wisdom. Meditating on this belief will cause our potentiality of being able to liberate all living beings permanently from suffering to ripen quickly, so that we shall attain enlightenment quickly. Therefore we should never abandon such a beneficial belief, which is the nature of wisdom. Meditation on taking is the quick path to enlightenment, and has a similar function to Tantric practice. It is said that Tantric realizations can be achieved simply through relying upon correct belief and imagination. This practice is very simple; all we need to do is to become deeply familiar with meditation on correct belief and imagination as presented in Tantra, by applying continual effort.

TRAINING IN GIVING IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE

PRACTICE OF THE SIX PERFECTIONS

‘Giving’ in this context means giving our own happiness to others through meditation. In general, in the cycle of impure life, samsara, there is no real happiness at all. As mentioned previously, the happiness that we normally experience through eating, drinking, sex and so forth is not real happiness, but merely a reduction of a previous problem or dissatisfaction. For example, if the happiness we experience from sex is real happiness, then it would follow that sex itself would be a real cause of happiness. If this were true, then the more we had sex, the more our happiness would increase, but actually the opposite would happen; instead of happiness increasing, our suffering would increase. In *Four Hundred Verses* the Buddhist Master Aryadeva says:

The experience of suffering will never be changed by the same cause,
But we can see the experience of happiness will be changed by the same
cause.

This means that, for example, the suffering caused by fire will never be changed into happiness by that fire, but we can see that the happiness caused, for example, by eating will change into suffering just through eating.

How do we meditate on giving? In *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* Shantideva says:

... to accomplish the welfare of all living beings
I will transform my body into an enlightened wishfulfilling jewel.

We should regard our continuously residing body, our very subtle body, as the real wishfulfilling jewel; this is our Buddha nature through which the wishes of ourself and all other living beings will be fulfilled. We then think:

All living beings wish to be happy all the time, but they do not know how to do this. They never experience real happiness, because out of ignorance they destroy their own happiness by developing delusions such as anger and performing non-virtuous actions. How wonderful it would be if all these living beings experienced the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment! May they experience this happiness. I will now give my own future happiness of enlightenment to each and every living being.

Thinking in this way we imagine that from our continuously residing body at our heart we emanate infinite rays of light, which are in nature our future happiness of enlightenment. These reach all living beings of the six realms, and we strongly believe that each and every living being experiences the pure and everlasting happiness of enlightenment. We meditate on this belief single-pointedly for as long as possible. We should continually practise this meditation until we spontaneously believe that all living beings have actually received our future happiness of enlightenment now. Through this practice we are like a Bodhisattva who practises shepherd-like bodhichitta. Just as a shepherd wishes to provide protection and necessary conditions for his flock before he himself relaxes, a Bodhisattva who practises shepherd-like bodhichitta wishes to prepare protection and ultimate happiness for all beings before accomplishing it for himself.

This meditation has four main benefits: (1) it increases our wishing love for all living beings; (2) it ripens our potential ability to benefit all living beings; (3) it accumulates a great collection of merit, or good fortune; and (4) it causes our ordinary appearances and conceptions to cease.

Our future happiness of enlightenment is the result of our generating compassion for all living beings. The meditation on giving brings this future result into the path, and is therefore a quick path to enlightenment that has a similar function to Tantric practice. We should apply great effort to practise this meditation so that we can quickly make progress on the path to enlightenment.

When we are meditating on giving, our motivation should be wishing love. By giving love in this way we are practising the perfection of giving; by abandoning self-cherishing we are practising the perfection of moral discipline; by willingly accepting any adverse conditions obstructing our practice of giving we are practising the perfection of patience; by applying effort to practising this meditation continually, free from laziness, we are practising the perfection of effort; by concentrating single-pointedly on the meditation on giving, free from distraction, we are practising the perfection of concentration; and by realizing that we ourselves, all living beings, and their happiness all exist as mere names and do not inherently exist we are practising the perfection of wisdom. This is how we should train in the meditation on giving in conjunction with practising the six perfections.

Training in giving is a special meditation on wishing love that sincerely wishes all living beings to attain real happiness – the pure and everlasting

happiness of liberation and enlightenment. As mentioned above, meditation on wishing love is also called 'immeasurable love' because just by meditating on wishing love we receive immeasurable benefits in this life and in countless future lives.



Buddha of Compassion

Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta

When we meditate on emptiness to develop or increase ultimate bodhichitta, we are training in ultimate bodhichitta. Actual ultimate bodhichitta is a wisdom that directly realizes emptiness motivated by bodhichitta. It is called 'ultimate bodhichitta' because its object is ultimate truth, emptiness, and it is one of the main paths to enlightenment. The bodhichitta that has been explained so far is conventional bodhichitta, and this is the nature of compassion, whereas ultimate bodhichitta is the nature of wisdom. These two bodhichittas are like the two wings of a bird with which we can fly to the enlightened world.

If we do not know the meaning of emptiness there is no basis for training in ultimate bodhichitta, because emptiness is the object of ultimate bodhichitta. Je Tsongkhapa said:

The knowledge of emptiness is superior to any other knowledge,
The Teacher who teaches emptiness unmistakably is superior to any other
teacher,
And the realization of emptiness is the very essence of Buddhadharma.

WHAT IS EMPTINESS?

Emptiness is the way things really are. It is the way things exist as opposed to the way they appear. We naturally believe that the things we see around us, such as tables, chairs and houses, are truly existent, because we believe that they exist in exactly the way that they appear. However, the way things appear to our senses is deceptive and completely contradictory to the way in which they actually exist. Things appear to exist from their own side, without depending upon our mind. This book that appears to our mind, for example, seems to have its own independent, objective existence. It seems to be 'outside' whereas our mind seems to be 'inside'. We feel that the book can exist without our mind; we do not feel that our mind is in any way involved in bringing the book into existence. This way of existing independent of our mind is variously called 'true existence', 'inherent existence', 'existence from

its own side’, and ‘existence from the side of the object’.

Although things appear directly to our senses to be truly, or inherently, existent, in reality all phenomena lack, or are empty of, true existence. This book, our body, our friends, we ourselves, and the entire universe are in reality just appearances to mind, like things seen in a dream. If we dream of an elephant, the elephant appears vividly in all its detail – we can see it, hear it, smell it and touch it – but when we wake up we realize that it was just an appearance to mind. We do not wonder ‘Where is the elephant now?’, because we understand that it was simply a projection of our mind and had no existence outside our mind. When the dream awareness that apprehended the elephant ceased, the elephant did not go anywhere – it simply disappeared, for it was just an appearance to the mind and did not exist separately from the mind. Buddha said that the same is true for all phenomena; they are mere appearances to mind, totally dependent upon the minds that perceive them.

The world we experience when we are awake and the world we experience when we are dreaming are both mere appearances to mind that arise from our mistaken conceptions. If we want to say that the dream world is false, we also have to say that the waking world is false; and if we want to say that the waking world is true, we also have to say that the dream world is true. The only difference between them is that the dream world is an appearance to our subtle dreaming mind whereas the waking world is an appearance to our gross waking mind. The dream world exists only for as long as the dream awareness to which it appears exists, and the waking world exists only for as long as the waking awareness to which it appears exists. Buddha said: ‘You should know that all phenomena are like dreams.’ When we die, our gross waking minds dissolve into our very subtle mind and the world we experienced when we were alive simply disappears. The world as others perceive it will continue, but our personal world will disappear as completely and irrevocably as the world of last night’s dream.

Buddha also said that all phenomena are like illusions. There are many different types of illusion, such as mirages, rainbows or drug-induced hallucinations. In ancient times, there used to be magicians who would cast a spell over their audience, causing them to see objects, such as a piece of wood, as something else, such as a tiger. Those deceived by the spell would see what appeared to be a real tiger and develop fear, but those who arrived after the spell had been cast would simply see a piece of wood. What all illusions have in common is that the way they appear does not coincide with

the way they exist. Buddha likened all phenomena to illusions because, through the force of the imprints of self-grasping ignorance accumulated since beginningless time, whatever appears to our mind naturally appears to be truly existent and we instinctively assent to this appearance, but in reality everything is totally empty of true existence. Like a mirage that appears to be water but is not in fact water, things appear in a deceptive way. Not understanding their real nature we are fooled by appearances, and grasp at books and tables, bodies and worlds as truly existent. The result of grasping at phenomena in this way is that we develop self-cherishing, attachment, hatred, jealousy and other delusions, our mind becomes agitated and unbalanced, and our peace of mind is destroyed. We are like travellers in a desert who exhaust themselves running after mirages, or like someone walking down a road at night mistaking the shadows of the trees for criminals or wild animals waiting to attack.

THE EMPTINESS OF OUR BODY

To understand how phenomena are empty of true, or inherent, existence we should consider our own body. Once we have understood how our body lacks true existence we can easily apply the same reasoning to other objects.

In *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Bodhisattva Shantideva says:

Therefore, there is no body,
But, because of ignorance, we see a body within the hands and so forth,
Just like a mind mistakenly apprehending a person
When observing the shape of a pile of stones at dusk.

On one level we know our body very well – we know whether it is healthy or unhealthy, beautiful or ugly, and so forth. However, we never examine it more deeply, asking ourselves: ‘What precisely is my body? Where is my body? What is its real nature?’ If we did examine our body in this way we would not be able to find it – instead of finding our body the result of this examination would be that our body disappears. The meaning of the first part of Shantideva’s verse, ‘Therefore, there is no body’, is that if we search for our ‘real’ body, there is no body; our body exists only if we do not search for a real body behind its mere appearance.

There are two ways of searching for an object. An example of the first way, which we can call a 'conventional search', is searching for our car in a car park. The conclusion of this type of search is that we find the car, in the sense that we see the thing that everyone agrees is our car. However, having located our car in the car park, suppose we are still not satisfied with the mere appearance of the car and we want to determine exactly what the car is. We might then engage in what we can call an 'ultimate search' for the car, in which we look within the object itself to find something that is the object. To do this we ask ourselves: 'Are any of the individual parts of the car, the car? Are the wheels the car? Is the engine the car? Is the chassis the car?' and so forth. When conducting an ultimate search for our car we are not satisfied with just pointing to the bonnet, wheels and so forth, and then saying 'car'; we want to know what the car really is. Instead of just using the word 'car' as ordinary people do, we want to know what the word really refers to. We want to mentally separate the car from all that is not car, so that we can say 'This is what the car really is.' We want to find a car, but in truth there is no car; we can find nothing. In *Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* Buddha says: 'If you search for your body with wisdom you cannot find it.' This also applies to our car, our house and all other phenomena.

In *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says:

When examined in this way,
Who is living and who is it who will die?
What is the future and what is the past?
Who are our friends and who are our relatives?

I beseech you who are just like me,
Please know that all things are empty, like space.

The essential meaning of these words is that when we search for things with wisdom, there is no person who is living or dying, there is no past or future, and there is no present, including our friends and relatives. We should know that all phenomena are empty, like space, which means we should know that all phenomena are not other than emptiness.

To understand Shantideva's claim that in reality there is no body, we need to conduct an ultimate search for our body. If we are ordinary beings, all objects, including our body, appear to exist inherently. As mentioned above,

objects seem to be independent of our mind and independent of other phenomena. The universe appears to consist of discrete objects that have an existence from their own side. These objects appear to exist in themselves as stars, planets, mountains, people and so forth, 'waiting' to be experienced by conscious beings. Normally it does not occur to us that we are involved in any way in the existence of these phenomena. For example, we feel that our body exists from its own side and does not depend upon our mind, or anyone else's, to bring it into existence. However, if our body did exist in the way that we instinctively grasp it – as an external object rather than just a projection of mind – we should be able to point to our body without pointing to any phenomenon that is not our body. We should be able to find it amongst its parts or outside its parts. Since there is no third possibility, if our body cannot be found either amongst its parts or outside its parts we must conclude that our body that we normally see does not exist.

It is not difficult to understand that the individual parts of our body are not our body – it is absurd to say that our back, our legs, or our head are our body. If one of the parts, say our back, is our body, then the other parts are equally our body, and it would follow that we have many bodies. Furthermore, our back, legs and so forth cannot be our body because they are parts of our body. The body is the part-possessor, and the back, legs and so forth are the possessed parts; and possessor and possessed cannot be one and the same.

Some people believe that although none of the individual parts of the body is the body, the collection of all the parts assembled together is the body. According to them, it is possible to find our body when we search for it analytically because the collection of all the parts of our body is our body. However, this assertion can be refuted with many valid reasons. The force of these reasons may not be immediately obvious to us, but if we contemplate them carefully with a calm and positive mind we shall come to appreciate their validity.

Since none of the individual parts of our body is our body, how can the collection of all the parts be our body? For example, a collection of dogs cannot be a human being, because none of the individual dogs is human. As each individual member is 'non-human', how can this collection of non-humans magically transform into a human? Similarly, since the collection of the parts of our body is a collection of things that are not our body, it cannot be our body. Just as the collection of dogs remains simply dogs, so the

collection of all the parts of our body remains simply parts of our body – it does not magically transform into the part-possessor, our body.

We may find this point difficult to understand, but if we think about it for a long time with a calm and positive mind, and discuss it with more experienced practitioners, it will gradually become clearer. We can also consult authentic books on the subject, such as *The New Heart of Wisdom* and *Ocean of Nectar*.

There is another way in which we can know that the collection of the parts of our body is not our body. If we can point to the collection of the parts of our body and say that this is, in itself, our body, then the collection of the parts of our body must exist independently of all phenomena that are not our body. Thus it would follow that the collection of the parts of our body exists independently of the parts themselves. This is clearly absurd – if it were true, we could remove all the parts of our body and the collection of the parts would remain. We can therefore conclude that the collection of the parts of our body is not our body.

Since the body cannot be found within its parts, either as an individual part or as the collection, the only possibility that remains is that it exists separately from its parts. If this is the case, it should be possible mentally or physically to remove all the parts of our body and still be left with the body. However, if we remove our arms, our legs, our head, our trunk and all the other parts of our body, no body is left. This proves that there is no body separate from its parts. It is because of ignorance that whenever we point to our body we are pointing only to a part of our body, which is not our body.

We have now searched in every possible place and have been unable to find our body either amongst its parts or anywhere else. We can find nothing that corresponds to the vividly appearing body that we normally grasp at. We are forced to agree with Shantideva that, when we search for our body, there is no body to be found. This clearly proves that our body that we normally see does not exist. It is almost as if our body does not exist at all. Indeed, the only sense in which we can say that our body does exist is if we are satisfied with the mere name ‘body’ and do not expect to find a real body behind the name. If we try to find, or point to, a real body to which the name ‘body’ refers, we shall not find anything at all. Instead of finding a truly existent body, we shall perceive the mere absence of our body that we normally see. This mere absence of our body that we normally see is the way our body actually exists. We shall realize that the body we normally perceive, grasp at

and cherish does not exist at all. This non-existence of the body we normally grasp at is the emptiness of our body, the true nature of our body.

The term 'true nature' is very meaningful. Not being satisfied with the mere appearance and name 'body' we examined our body to discover its true nature. The result of this examination was a definite non-finding of our body. Where we expected to find a truly existent body, we discovered the utter non-existence of that truly existent body. This non-existence, or emptiness, is the true nature of our body. Apart from the mere absence of a truly existent body, there is no other true nature of our body – every other attribute of the body is just part of its deceptive nature. Since this is the case, why do we spend so much time focusing on the deceptive nature of our body? At present we ignore the true nature of our body and other phenomena, and concentrate only on their deceptive nature; yet the result of concentrating all the time on deceptive objects is that our mind becomes disturbed and we remain in the miserable life of samsara. If we wish to experience pure happiness, we must acquaint our mind with the truth. Instead of wasting our energy focusing only on meaningless, deceptive objects, we should focus on the true nature of things.

Although it is impossible to find our body when we search for it analytically, when we do not engage in analysis our body appears very clearly. Why is this? Shantideva says that because of ignorance we see our body within the hands and other parts of our body. In reality, our body does not exist within its parts. Just as at dusk we might see a pile of stones as a man even though there is no man within the stones, so in the same way our ignorant mind sees a body within the collection of arms, legs and so forth, even though no body exists there. The body we see within the collection of arms and legs is simply a hallucination of our ignorant mind. Not recognizing it as such, however, we grasp at it very strongly, cherish it, and exhaust ourselves in trying to protect it from any discomfort.

The way to familiarize our mind with the true nature of the body is to use the above reasoning to search for our body and then, when we have searched in every possible place and not found it, to concentrate on the space-like emptiness that is the mere absence of the body that we normally see. This space-like emptiness is the true nature of our body. Although it resembles empty space, it is a meaningful emptiness. Its meaning is the utter non-existence of the body that we normally see, the body that we grasp at so strongly and have cherished all our life.

Through becoming familiar with the experience of the space-like ultimate nature of the body, our grasping at our body will be reduced. As a result we shall experience far less suffering, anxiety and frustration in relation to our body. Our physical tension will diminish and our health will improve, and even when we do become sick our physical discomfort will not disturb our mind. Those who have a direct experience of emptiness do not feel any pain even if they are beaten or shot. Knowing that the real nature of their body is like space, for them being beaten is like space being beaten and being shot is like space being shot. Moreover, good and bad external conditions no longer have the power to disturb their mind, because they realize them to be like a magician's illusion, with no existence separate from the mind. Instead of being pulled about by changing conditions like a puppet on a string, their minds remain free and tranquil in the knowledge of the equal and unchanging ultimate nature of all things. In this way, a person who directly realizes emptiness, the true nature of phenomena, experiences peace and happiness day and night, life after life.

We need to distinguish between the conventionally existent body that does exist and the inherently existent body that does not exist; but we must take care not to be misled by the words into thinking that the conventionally existent body is anything more than a mere appearance to mind. It is perhaps less confusing simply to say that for a mind that directly sees the truth, or emptiness, there is no body. A body exists only for an ordinary mind to which a body appears.

Shantideva advises us that unless we wish to understand emptiness we should not examine conventional truths such as our body, possessions, places and friends, but instead be satisfied with their mere names, as are worldly people. Once a worldly person knows an object's name and purpose he is satisfied that he knows the object and does not investigate further. We must do the same, unless we want to meditate on emptiness. However, we should remember that if we did examine objects more closely we would not find them, for they would simply disappear, just as a mirage disappears if we try to look for it.

The same reasoning that we have used to prove the lack of true existence of our body can be applied to all other phenomena. This book, for example, seems to exist from its own side, somewhere within its parts; but when we examine the book more precisely we discover that none of the individual pages nor the collection of the pages is the book, yet without them there is no

book. Instead of finding a truly existent book we are left beholding an emptiness that is the non-existence of the book we previously held to exist. Because of our ignorance the book appears to exist separately from our mind, as if our mind were inside and the book outside, but through analyzing the book we discover that this appearance is completely false. There is no book outside the mind. There is no book ‘out there’, within the pages. The only way the book exists is as a mere appearance to mind, a mere projection of the mind.

All phenomena exist by way of convention; nothing is inherently existent. This applies to mind, to Buddha, and even to emptiness itself. Everything is merely imputed by mind. All phenomena have parts – physical phenomena have physical parts, and non-physical phenomena have various parts, or attributes, that can be distinguished by thought. Using the same type of reasoning as above, we can realize that any phenomenon is not one of its parts, not the collection of its parts, and not separate from its parts. In this way we can realize the emptiness of all phenomena, the mere absence of all phenomena that we normally see or perceive.

It is particularly helpful to meditate on the emptiness of objects that arouse in us strong delusions like attachment or anger. By analyzing correctly we shall realize that the object we desire, or the object we dislike, does not exist from its own side. Its beauty or ugliness, and even its very existence, are imputed by mind. By thinking in this way we shall discover that there is no basis for attachment or anger.

THE EMPTINESS OF OUR MIND

In *Training the Mind in Seven Points*, after outlining how to engage in analytical meditation on the emptiness of inherent existence of outer phenomena such as our body, Geshe Chekhawa continues by saying that we should then analyze our own mind to understand how it lacks inherent existence.

Our mind is not an independent entity, but an ever-changing continuum that depends upon many factors, such as its previous moments, its objects, and the inner energy winds upon which our minds are mounted. Like everything else, our mind is imputed upon a collection of many factors and therefore lacks inherent existence. A primary mind, or consciousness, for

example, has five parts or ‘mental factors’: feeling, discrimination, intention, contact and attention. Neither the individual mental factors nor the collection of these mental factors is the primary mind itself, because they are mental factors and therefore parts of the primary mind. However, there is no primary mind that is separate from these mental factors. A primary mind is merely imputed upon the mental factors that are its basis of imputation, and therefore it does not exist from its own side.

Having identified the nature of our primary mind, which is an empty like space that perceives or understands objects, we then search for it within its parts – feeling, discrimination, intention, contact and attention – until finally we realize its unfindability. This unfindability is its ultimate nature, or emptiness. We then think:

All phenomena that appear to my mind are the nature of my mind. My mind is the nature of emptiness.

In this way we feel that everything dissolves into emptiness. We perceive only the emptiness of all phenomena and we meditate on this emptiness. This way of meditating on emptiness is more profound than the meditation on the emptiness of our body. Gradually our experience of emptiness will become clearer and clearer until finally we gain an undefiled wisdom that directly realizes the emptiness of all phenomena.

THE EMPTINESS OF OUR I

The object we grasp at most strongly is our self or I. Due to the imprints of self-grasping ignorance accumulated over time without beginning, our I appears to us as inherently existent, and our self-grasping mind automatically grasps at it in this way. Although we grasp at an inherently existent I all the time, even during sleep, it is not easy to identify how it appears to our mind. To identify it clearly, we must begin by allowing it to manifest strongly by contemplating situations in which we have an exaggerated sense of I, such as when we are embarrassed, ashamed, afraid or indignant. We recall or imagine such a situation and then, without any comment or analysis, try to gain a clear mental image of how the I naturally appears at such times. We have to be patient at this stage because it may take many sessions before we gain a clear

image. Eventually we shall see that the I appears to be completely solid and real, existing from its own side without depending upon the body or the mind. This vividly appearing I is the inherently existent I that we cherish so strongly. It is the I that we defend when we are criticized and that we are so proud of when we are praised.

Once we have an image of how the I appears in these extreme circumstances, we should try to identify how it appears normally, in less extreme situations. For example, we can observe the I that is presently reading this book and try to discover how it appears to our mind. Eventually we shall see that although in this case there is not such an inflated sense of I, nevertheless the I still appears to be inherently existent, existing from its own side without depending upon the body or the mind. Once we have an image of the inherently existent I, we focus on it for a while with single-pointed concentration. Then in meditation we proceed to the next stage, which is to contemplate valid reasons to prove that the inherently existent I we are grasping at does not in fact exist. The inherently existent I and our self that we normally see are the same; we should know that neither exists, both are objects negated by emptiness.

If the I exists in the way that it appears, it must exist in one of four ways: as the body, as the mind, as the collection of the body and mind, or as something separate from the body and mind; there is no other possibility. We contemplate this carefully until we become convinced that this is the case and then we proceed to examine each of the four possibilities:

(1) If our I is our body, there is no sense in saying ‘my body’, because the possessor and the possessed are identical.

If our I is our body, there is no future rebirth because the I ceases when the body dies.

If our I and our body are identical, then since we are capable of developing faith, dreaming, solving mathematical puzzles and so on, it follows that flesh, blood and bones can do the same.

Since none of this is true, it follows that our I is not our body.

(2) If our I is our mind, there is no sense in saying ‘my mind’, because the possessor and the possessed are identical; but usually when we focus on our mind we say ‘my mind’. This clearly indicates that our I is not our mind.

If our I is our mind, then since we have many types of mind, such as the six consciousnesses, conceptual minds and non-conceptual minds, it follows that we have just as many I's. Since this is absurd, our I cannot be our mind.

(3) Since our body is not our I and our mind is not our I, the collection of our body and mind cannot be our I. The collection of our body and mind is a collection of things that are not our I, so how can the collection itself be our I? For example, in a herd of cows none of the animals is a sheep, therefore the herd itself is not sheep. In the same way, in the collection of our body and mind, neither our body nor our mind is our I, therefore the collection itself is not our I.

(4) If our I is not our body, not our mind, and not the collection of our body and mind, the only possibility that remains is that it is something separate from our body and mind. If this is the case, we must be able to apprehend our I without either our body or our mind appearing, but if we imagine that our body and our mind were completely to disappear there would be nothing remaining that could be called our I. Therefore it follows that our I is not separate from our body and mind.

We should imagine that our body gradually dissolves into thin air, and then our mind dissolves, our thoughts scatter with the wind, our feelings, wishes and awareness melt into nothingness. Is there anything left that is our I? There is nothing. Clearly, our I is not something separate from our body and mind.

We have now examined all four possibilities and have failed to find our I or self. Since we have already decided that there is no fifth possibility, we must conclude that our I that we normally grasp at and cherish does not exist at all. Where there previously appeared an inherently existent I, there now appears an absence of that I. This absence of an inherently existent I is emptiness, ultimate truth.

We contemplate in this way until there appears to us a generic, or mental, image of the absence of our self that we normally see. This image is our object of placement meditation. We try to become completely familiar with it by continually meditating on it single-pointedly for as long as possible.

Because we have grasped at our inherently existent I since beginningless

time, and have cherished it more dearly than anything else, the experience of failing to find our self in meditation can be quite shocking at first. Some people develop fear, thinking 'I have become completely non-existent.' Others feel great joy, as if the source of all their problems were vanishing. Both reactions are good signs and indicate correct meditation. After a while these initial reactions will subside and our mind will settle into a more balanced state. Then we shall be able to meditate on the emptiness of our self in a calm, controlled manner.

We should allow our mind to become absorbed in space-like emptiness for as long as possible. It is important to remember that our object is emptiness, the mere absence of our self that we normally see, not mere nothingness. Occasionally we should check our meditation with alertness. If our mind has wandered to another object, or if we have lost the meaning of emptiness and are focusing on mere nothingness, we should return to the contemplations to bring the emptiness of our self clearly to mind once again.

We may wonder: 'If my self that I normally see does not exist, then who is meditating? Who will get up from meditation, speak to others, and reply when my name is called?' Although our self that we normally see does not exist, this does not mean that our self does not exist at all. We exist as a mere imputation. So long as we are satisfied with the mere imputation of our 'self', there is no problem. We can think 'I exist', 'I am going to town', and so on. The problem arises only when we look for our self other than the mere conceptual imputation 'I', our 'self'. Our mind grasps at an I that ultimately exists, independently of conceptual imputation, as if there were a 'real' I existing behind the label. If such an I existed, we would be able to find it, but we have seen that our I cannot be found upon investigation. The conclusion of our search was a definite non-finding of our self. This unfindability of our self is the emptiness of our self, the ultimate nature of our self. Our self that exists as mere imputation is our existent self. In the same way, phenomena that exist as mere imputation are existent phenomena. There are no self and other phenomena that exist other than mere imputation. In truth, our self and other phenomena that exist as mere imputation is the ultimate nature of our self and other phenomena, not the conventional nature. At first these explanations are difficult to understand, but please be patient. We should apply effort to receive the powerful blessings of Wisdom Buddha Je Tsongkhapa through sincerely engaging in the practice of *Heart Jewel*.

When we first realize emptiness we do so conceptually, by means of a generic image. By continuing to meditate on emptiness over and over again, the generic image gradually becomes more and more transparent until it disappears entirely and we see emptiness directly. This direct realization of emptiness will be our first completely non-mistaken awareness, or undefiled mind. Until we realize emptiness directly, all our minds are mistaken awarenesses because, due to the imprints of self-grasping or true-grasping ignorance, their objects appear as inherently existent.

Most people veer towards the extreme of existence, thinking that if something exists it must exist inherently, thus exaggerating the way in which things exist without being satisfied with them as mere name. Others may veer towards the extreme of non-existence, thinking that if phenomena do not exist inherently they do not exist at all, thus exaggerating their lack of inherent existence. We need to realize that although phenomena lack any trace of existence from their own side, they do exist conventionally as mere appearances to a valid mind.

The conceptual minds grasping at our I and other phenomena as being truly existent are wrong awarenesses and should therefore be abandoned, but I am not saying that all conceptual thoughts are wrong awarenesses and should therefore be abandoned. There are many correct conceptual minds that are useful in our day-to-day lives, such as the conceptual mind remembering what we did yesterday or the conceptual mind understanding what we will do tomorrow. There are also many conceptual minds that need to be cultivated on the spiritual path. For example, conventional bodhichitta in the mental continuum of a Bodhisattva is a conceptual mind because it apprehends its object, great enlightenment, by means of a generic image. Moreover, before we can realize emptiness directly with a non-conceptual mind, we need to realize it by means of a subsequent valid cognizer, which is a conceptual mind. Through contemplating the reasons that refute inherent existence, there appears to our mind a generic image of the absence, or empty, of inherent existence. This is the only way that emptiness can initially appear to our mind. We then meditate on this image with stronger and stronger concentration until finally we perceive emptiness directly.

There are some people who say that the way to meditate on emptiness is simply to empty our mind of all conceptual thoughts, arguing that just as white clouds obscure the sun as much as black clouds, so positive conceptual thoughts obscure our mind as much as negative conceptual thoughts. This

view is completely mistaken, for if we make no effort to gain a conceptual understanding of emptiness, but try instead to suppress all conceptual thoughts, actual emptiness will never appear to our mind. We may achieve a vivid experience of a space-like vacuity, but this is just the absence of conceptual thought – it is not emptiness, the true nature of phenomena. Meditation on this vacuity may temporarily calm our mind, but it will never destroy our delusions nor liberate us from samsara and its sufferings.

THE EMPTINESS WHICH IS EMPTY OF THE EIGHT EXTREMES

If all the necessary atmospheric causes and conditions come together, clouds will appear. If these are absent, clouds cannot form. The clouds are completely dependent upon causes and conditions for their development; without these they have no power to develop. The same is true for mountains, planets, bodies, minds and all other produced phenomena. Because they depend upon factors outside themselves for their existence, they are empty of inherent, or independent, existence and are mere imputations of the mind.

Contemplating the teachings on karma – actions and their effects – can help us to understand this. Where do all our good and bad experiences come from? According to Buddhism they are the result of the positive and negative karma we created in the past. As a result of positive karma, attractive and agreeable people appear in our life, pleasant material conditions arise and we live in a beautiful environment; but as a result of negative karma, unpleasant people and things appear. This world is the effect of the collective karma created by the beings who inhabit it. Because karma originates in the mind – specifically in our mental intentions – we can see that all worlds arise from the mind. This is similar to the way in which appearances arise in a dream. Everything we perceive when we are dreaming is the result of the ripening of karmic potentials in our mind and has no existence outside of our mind. When our mind is calm and pure, positive karmic imprints ripen and pleasant dream appearances arise; but when our mind is agitated and impure, negative karmic imprints ripen and unpleasant, nightmarish appearances arise. In a similar way, all the appearances of our waking world are simply the ripening of positive, negative, or neutral karmic imprints in our mind.

Once we understand how things arise from their inner and outer causes and

conditions and have no independent existence, then just seeing or thinking about the production of phenomena will remind us of their emptiness. Instead of reinforcing our sense of the solidity and objectivity of things, we shall begin to see things as manifestations of their emptiness, with no more concrete existence than a rainbow arising out of an empty sky.

Just as the production of things depends upon causes and conditions, so too does the disintegration of things. Therefore, neither production nor disintegration can be truly existent. For example, if our new car were destroyed we would feel unhappy because we grasp at both the car and the disintegration of the car as truly existent; but if we understood that our car is merely an appearance to our mind, like a car in a dream, its destruction would not disturb us. This is true for all objects of our attachment: if we realize that both objects and their cessations lack true existence, there is no basis for becoming upset if we are separated from them.

All functioning things – our environments, enjoyments, body, mind and our self – change from moment to moment. They are impermanent in the sense that they do not last for a second moment. The book you are reading in this moment is not the same book that you were reading a moment ago, and it could only come into existence because the book of a moment ago ceased to exist. When we understand subtle impermanence – that our body, our mind, our self and so forth do not abide for a second moment – it is not difficult to understand that they are empty of inherent existence.

Even though we may agree that impermanent phenomena are empty of inherent existence, we might think that because permanent phenomena are unchanging and do not arise from causes and conditions, they must exist inherently. However, even permanent phenomena such as emptiness and unproduced space – the mere absence of physical obstruction – are dependent-related phenomena because they depend upon their parts, their bases and the minds that impute them; and therefore they are not inherently existent. Although emptiness is ultimate reality, it is not independent or inherently existent for it too depends upon its parts, its bases and the minds that impute it. Just as a gold coin does not exist separately from its gold, so the emptiness of our body does not exist separately from our body, because it is simply our body's lack of inherent existence.

Whenever we go anywhere we develop the thought 'I am going', and grasp at an inherently existent act of going. In a similar way, when someone comes to visit us we think 'They are coming', and we grasp at an inherently existent

act of coming. Both these conceptions are self-grasping and wrong awarenesses. When someone goes away we feel that a truly existent person has truly left, and when they come back we feel that a truly existent person has truly returned. However, the coming and going of people is like the appearance and disappearance of a rainbow in the sky. When the causes and conditions for a rainbow to appear are assembled a rainbow appears, and when the causes and conditions for the continued appearance of the rainbow disperse the rainbow disappears; but the rainbow does not come from anywhere, nor does it go anywhere.

When we observe one object, such as our I, we strongly feel that it is a single, indivisible entity, and that its singularity is inherently existent. In reality, however, our I has many parts, such as the parts that look, listen, walk and think, or the parts that are, for example, a teacher, a mother, a daughter and a wife. Our I is imputed upon the collection of all these parts. As with each individual phenomenon it is a singularity, but its singularity is merely imputed, like an army that is merely imputed upon a collection of soldiers, or a forest that is imputed upon a collection of trees.

When we see more than one object, we regard the multiplicity of these objects to be inherently existent. However, just as singularity is merely imputed, likewise plurality is just an imputation by mind and does not exist from the side of the object. For example, instead of looking at a collection of soldiers or trees from the point of view of the individual soldiers or trees, we could look at them as an army or a forest, that is, as a singular collection or whole, in which case we would be looking at a singularity rather than a plurality.

In summary, singularity does not exist from its own side because it is just imputed upon a plurality – its parts. In the same way, plurality does not exist from its own side because it is just imputed upon a singularity – the collection of its parts. Therefore singularity and plurality are mere imputations by conceptual mind and they lack true existence. If we realize this clearly, there is no basis for developing attachment and anger towards objects, either singular or plural. We tend to project the faults or qualities of the few onto the many, and then develop hatred or attachment on the basis of, for example, race, religion or country. Contemplating the emptiness of singularity and plurality can be helpful in reducing such hatred and attachment.

Although production, disintegration and so forth do exist, they do not exist

inherently. It is our conceptual minds of self-grasping ignorance that grasp them as inherently existent. These conceptions grasp at the eight extremes: inherently existent production, inherently existent disintegration, inherently existent impermanence, inherently existent permanence, inherently existent going, inherently existent coming, inherently existent singularity and inherently existent plurality. Although these extremes do not exist, due to our ignorance we are always grasping them. The conceptions of these extremes lie at the root of all other delusions, and because delusions give rise to our performing contaminated actions that keep us trapped in the prison of samsara, these conceptions are the root of samsara, the cycle of impure life.

Inherently existent production is the same as the production that we normally see, and we should know that in reality neither of these exists. This is the same for the remaining seven extremes. For example, inherently existent disintegration and destruction and the disintegration and destruction that we normally see are the same, and we should know that neither of these exists. Our minds that grasp at these eight extremes are different aspects of our self-grasping ignorance. Because it is our self-grasping ignorance that causes us to experience endless suffering and problems, when this ignorance ceases permanently through meditation on the emptiness of all phenomena, all our suffering of this life and countless future lives will cease permanently and we shall accomplish the real meaning of human life.

The subject of the eight extremes is profound and requires detailed explanation and lengthy study. Buddha explains them in detail in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*; and in *Fundamental Wisdom*, a commentary to the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, Nagarjuna also uses many profound and powerful reasons to prove that the eight extremes do not exist by showing how all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Through analyzing conventional truths he establishes their ultimate nature, and shows why it is necessary to understand both the conventional and ultimate natures of an object in order to understand that object fully.

CONVENTIONAL AND ULTIMATE TRUTHS

Whatever exists is either a conventional truth or an ultimate truth, and, since ultimate truth refers just to emptiness, everything except emptiness is a conventional truth. For example, things such as houses, cars and tables are all

conventional truths.

All conventional truths are false objects because the way they appear and the way they exist do not correspond. If someone appears to be friendly and kind but his real intention is to gain our confidence in order to rob us, we would say that he is false or deceptive because there is a discrepancy between the way he appears and his real nature. Similarly, objects such as forms and sounds are false or deceptive because they appear to exist inherently but in reality are completely devoid of inherent existence. Because the way they appear does not coincide with the way they exist, conventional truths are known as 'deceptive phenomena'. A cup, for instance, appears to exist independently of its parts, its causes and the mind that apprehends it, but in reality it totally depends upon these things. Because the way the cup appears to our mind and the way it exists do not correspond, the cup is a false object.

Although conventional truths are false objects, nevertheless they actually exist because a mind directly perceiving a conventional truth is a valid mind, a completely reliable mind. For instance, an eye consciousness directly perceiving a cup on the table is a valid mind because it will not deceive us – if we reach out to pick up the cup we shall find it where our eye consciousness sees it. In this respect, an eye consciousness perceiving a cup on the table is different from an eye consciousness mistaking a cup reflected in a mirror for a real cup, or an eye consciousness seeing a mirage as water. Even though a cup is a false object, for practical purposes the eye consciousness that directly perceives it is a valid, reliable mind. However, although it is a valid mind it is nevertheless a mistaken awareness insofar as the cup appears to that mind to be truly existent. It is valid and non-deceptive with respect to the conventional characteristics of the cup – its position, size, colour and so forth – but mistaken with respect to its appearance.

To summarize, conventional objects are false because, although they appear to exist from their own side, in reality they are mere appearances to mind, like things seen in a dream. Within the context of a dream, however, dream objects have a relative validity, and this distinguishes them from things that do not exist at all. Suppose in a dream we steal a diamond and someone then asks us whether it was we who stole it. Even though the dream is merely a creation of our mind, if we answer 'yes' we are telling the truth whereas if we answer 'no' we are telling a lie. In the same way, even though in reality the whole universe is just an appearance to mind, within the context of the experience of ordinary beings we can distinguish between relative

truths and relative falsities.

Conventional truths can be divided into gross conventional truths and subtle conventional truths. We can understand how all phenomena have these two levels of conventional truth by considering the example of a car. The car itself, the car depending on its causes, and the car depending on its parts are all gross conventional truths of the car. They are called 'gross' because they are relatively easy to understand. The car depending on its basis of imputation is quite subtle and is not easy to understand, but it is still a gross conventional truth. The basis of imputation of the car is the parts of the car. To apprehend car, the parts of the car must appear to our mind; without the parts appearing, there is no way to develop the thought 'car'. For this reason, the parts are the basis of imputation of the car. We say 'I see a car', but strictly speaking all we ever see is parts of the car. However, when we develop the thought 'car' by seeing its parts, we see the car. There is no car other than its parts, there is no body other than its parts, and so on. The car existing merely as an imputation by thought is the subtle conventional truth of the car. We have understood this when we realize that the car is nothing more than a mere imputation by a valid mind. We cannot understand subtle conventional truths unless we have understood emptiness. When we thoroughly realize subtle conventional truth we have realized both conventional truth and ultimate truth.

Strictly speaking, truth, ultimate truth and emptiness are synonymous because conventional truths are not real truths but false objects. They are true only for the minds of those who have not realized emptiness. Only emptiness is true because only emptiness exists in the way that it appears. When the mind of any sentient being directly perceives conventional truths, such as forms, they appear to exist from their own side. When the mind of a Superior being directly perceives emptiness, however, nothing appears other than emptiness; this mind is totally mixed with the mere absence of inherently existent phenomena. The way in which emptiness appears to the mind of a non-conceptual direct perceiver corresponds exactly to the way in which emptiness exists.

It should be noted that although emptiness is ultimate truth it is not inherently existent. Emptiness is not a separate reality existing behind conventional appearances, but the real nature of those appearances. We cannot talk about emptiness in isolation, for emptiness is always the mere lack of inherent existence of something. For example, the emptiness of our

body is the lack of inherent existence of our body, and without our body as its basis this emptiness cannot exist. Because emptiness necessarily depends upon a basis, it lacks inherent existence.

In *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva defines ultimate truth as a phenomenon that is true for the uncontaminated mind of a Superior being. An uncontaminated mind is a mind that realizes emptiness directly. This mind is the only unmistakable awareness and is possessed exclusively by Superior beings. Because uncontaminated minds are completely unmistakable, anything directly perceived by them to be true is necessarily an ultimate truth. In contrast, anything that is directly perceived to be true by the mind of an ordinary being is necessarily not an ultimate truth, because all minds of ordinary beings are mistaken, and mistaken minds can never directly perceive the truth.

Because of the imprints of conceptual thoughts that grasp at the eight extremes, everything that appears to the minds of ordinary beings appears to be inherently existent. Only the wisdom of meditative equipoise that directly realizes emptiness is undefiled by the imprints, or stains, of these conceptual thoughts. This is the only wisdom that has no mistaken appearance.

When a Superior Bodhisattva meditates on emptiness his or her mind mixes with emptiness completely, with no appearance of inherent existence. He develops a completely pure, uncontaminated wisdom that is ultimate bodhichitta. When he arises from meditative equipoise, however, due to the imprints of true-grasping, conventional phenomena again appear to his mind as inherently existent, and his uncontaminated wisdom temporarily becomes non-manifest. Only a Buddha can manifest uncontaminated wisdom at the same time as directly perceiving conventional truths. An uncommon quality of a Buddha is that a single moment of a Buddha's mind realizes both conventional truth and ultimate truth directly and simultaneously. There are many levels of ultimate bodhichitta. For instance, the ultimate bodhichitta attained through Tantric practice is more profound than that developed through Sutra practice alone, and the supreme ultimate bodhichitta is that of a Buddha.

If through valid reasoning we realize the mere absence of the first extreme, the extreme of production, we shall easily be able to realize the mere absence of the remaining seven extremes. Once we have realized the mere absence of the eight extremes we have realized the emptiness of all phenomena. Having gained this realization, we continue to contemplate and meditate on the

emptiness of produced phenomena and so forth, and as our meditations deepen we shall feel all phenomena dissolving into emptiness. We shall then be able to maintain a single-pointed concentration on the emptiness of all phenomena.

To meditate on the emptiness of produced phenomena we can think:

My self who was born, through causes and conditions, as a human being is unfindable when I search for it with wisdom within my body and my mind, or separate from my body and mind. This proves that my self that I normally see does not exist at all.

Having contemplated in this way we feel our self that we normally see disappears and we perceive a space-like emptiness that is the mere absence of our self that we normally see. We feel that our mind enters into this space-like emptiness and remains there single-pointedly. This meditation is called ‘space-like meditative equipoise on emptiness’.

Just as eagles soar through the vast expanse of the sky without meeting any obstructions, needing only minimal effort to maintain their flight, so advanced meditators concentrating on emptiness can meditate on emptiness for a long time with little effort. Their minds soar through space-like emptiness, undistracted by any other phenomenon. When we meditate on emptiness we should try to emulate these meditators. Once we have found our object of meditation, the mere absence of our self that we normally see, we should refrain from further analysis and simply rest our mind in the experience of this emptiness. From time to time we should check to make sure that we have lost neither the clear appearance of emptiness nor the recognition of its meaning, but we should not check too forcefully as this will disturb our concentration. Our meditation should not be like the flight of a small bird, which never stops flapping its wings and is always changing direction, but like the flight of an eagle, which soars gently with only occasional adjustments to its wings. Through meditating in this way we shall feel our mind dissolving into and becoming one with emptiness.

If we are successful in doing this, then during our meditation we are free from manifest self-grasping. If, on the other hand, we spend all our time checking and analyzing, never allowing our mind to relax into the space of emptiness, we shall never gain this experience and our meditation will not serve to reduce our self-grasping.

In general we need to improve our understanding of emptiness through extensive study, approaching it from many angles and using many different lines of reasoning. It is also important to become thoroughly familiar with one complete meditation on emptiness through continuous contemplation, understanding exactly how to use the reasoning to lead to an experience of emptiness. We can then concentrate on emptiness single-pointedly and try to mix our mind with it, like water mixing with water.

THE UNION OF THE TWO TRUTHS

The union of the two truths means that conventional truths, such as our body, and ultimate truths, such as the emptiness of our body, are the same nature. When something such as our body appears to us, both the body and the inherently existent body appear simultaneously. This is dualistic appearance, which is subtle mistaken appearance. Only Buddhas are free from such mistaken appearances. The main purpose of understanding and meditating on the union of the two truths is to prevent dualistic appearances – appearances of inherent existence to the mind that is meditating on emptiness – and thereby enable our mind to dissolve into emptiness. Once we can do this, our meditation on emptiness will be very powerful in eliminating our delusions. If we correctly identify and negate the inherently existent body, the body that we normally see, and meditate on the mere absence of such a body with strong concentration, we shall feel our normal body dissolving into emptiness. We shall understand that the real nature of our body is emptiness and that our body is merely a manifestation of emptiness.

Emptiness is like the sky and our body is like the blue of the sky. Just as the blue is a manifestation of the sky itself and cannot be separated from it, so our blue-like body is simply a manifestation of the sky of its emptiness and cannot be separated from it. If we realize this, when we focus on the emptiness of our body we feel that our body itself dissolves into its ultimate nature. In this way, we can easily overcome the conventional appearance of the body in our meditations, and our mind naturally mixes with emptiness.

In the *Heart Sutra*, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara says: ‘Form is not other than emptiness.’ This means that conventional phenomena, such as our body, do not exist separately from their emptiness. When we meditate on the emptiness of our body with this understanding, we know that the emptiness

appearing to our mind is the very nature of our body, and that apart from this emptiness there is no body. Meditating in this way will greatly weaken our self-grasping mind. If we really believed that our body and its emptiness were the same nature, our self-grasping would definitely become weaker.

Although we can divide emptinesses from the point of view of their bases, and speak of the emptiness of the body, the emptiness of the I and so forth, in truth all emptinesses are the same nature. If we look at ten bottles, we can distinguish ten different spaces inside the bottles, but in reality these spaces are the same nature; and if we break the bottles, the spaces become indistinguishable. In the same way, although we can speak of the emptiness of the body, the mind, the I and so forth, in reality they are the same nature and indistinguishable. The only way in which they can be distinguished is by their conventional bases.

There are two principal benefits of understanding that all emptinesses are the same nature: in the meditation session our mind will mix with emptiness more easily, and in the meditation break we shall be able to see all appearances as equal manifestations of their emptiness.

For as long as we feel that there is a gap between our mind and emptiness – that our mind is ‘here’ and emptiness is ‘there’ – our mind will not mix with emptiness. Knowing that all emptinesses are the same nature helps to close this gap. In ordinary life we experience many different objects – good, bad, attractive, unattractive – and our feelings towards them differ. Because we feel that the differences exist from the side of the objects, our mind is unbalanced and we develop attachment to attractive objects, aversion to unattractive objects and indifference to neutral objects. It is very difficult to mix such an uneven mind with emptiness. To mix our mind with emptiness we need to know that, although phenomena appear in many different aspects, in essence they are all empty. The differences we see are just appearances to mistaken minds; from the point of view of ultimate truth all phenomena are equal in emptiness. For a qualified meditator single-pointedly absorbed in emptiness, there is no difference between production and disintegration, impermanence and permanence, going and coming, singularity and plurality – everything is equal in emptiness and all problems of attachment, anger and self-grasping ignorance are solved. In this experience, everything becomes very peaceful and comfortable, balanced and harmonious, joyful and wonderful. There is no heat, no cold, no lower, no higher, no here, no there, no self, no other, no samsara – everything is equal in the peace of emptiness.

This realization is called the ‘yoga of equalizing samsara and nirvana’, and is explained in detail in both the Sutras and Tantras.

Since all emptinesses are the same nature, the ultimate nature of a mind that is meditating on emptiness is the same nature as the ultimate nature of its object. When we first meditate on emptiness our mind and emptiness appear to be two separate phenomena, but when we understand that all emptinesses are the same nature we shall know that this feeling of separation is simply the experience of a mistaken mind. In reality our mind and emptiness are ultimately of one taste. If we apply this knowledge in our meditations, it will help to prevent the appearance of the conventional nature of our mind and allow our mind to dissolve into emptiness.

Having mixed our mind with emptiness, when we arise from meditation we shall experience all phenomena equally as manifestations of their emptiness. Instead of feeling that the attractive, unattractive and neutral objects we see are inherently different, we shall know that in essence they are the same nature. Just as both the gentlest and most violent waves in an ocean are equally water, likewise both attractive forms and repulsive forms are equally manifestations of emptiness. Realizing this, our mind will become balanced and peaceful. We shall recognize all conventional appearances as the magical play of the mind, and we shall not grasp strongly at their apparent differences.

When Milarepa once taught emptiness to a woman, he compared emptiness to the sky and conventional truths to clouds and told her to meditate on the sky. She followed his instructions with great success, but she had one problem – when she meditated on the sky of emptiness everything disappeared, and she could not understand how phenomena could exist conventionally. She said to Milarepa: ‘I find it easy to meditate on the sky but difficult to establish the clouds. Please teach me how to meditate on the clouds.’ Milarepa replied: ‘If your meditation on the sky is going well, the clouds will not be a problem. Clouds simply appear in the sky – they arise from the sky and dissolve back into the sky. As your experience of the sky improves, you will naturally come to understand the clouds.’

In Tibetan, the word for both sky and space is ‘namkha’, although space is different from sky. There are two types of space, produced space and unproduced space. Produced space is the visible space we can see inside a room or in the sky. This space may become dark at night and light during the day, and as it undergoes change in this way it is an impermanent

phenomenon. The characteristic property of produced space is that it does not obstruct objects – if there is space in a room we can place objects there without obstruction. Similarly, birds are able to fly through the space of the sky because it lacks obstruction, whereas they cannot fly through a mountain! Therefore it is clear that produced space lacks, or is empty of, obstructive contact. This mere lack, or empty, of obstructive contact is unproduced space.

Because unproduced space is the mere absence of obstructive contact it does not undergo momentary change and is therefore a permanent phenomenon. Whereas produced space is visible and quite easy to understand, unproduced space is a mere absence of obstructive contact and is rather more subtle. However, once we understand unproduced space we shall find it easier to understand emptiness.

The only difference between emptiness and unproduced space is their object of negation. The object of negation of unproduced space is obstructive contact whereas the object of negation of emptiness is inherent existence. Because unproduced space is the best analogy for understanding emptiness, it is used in the Sutras and in many scriptures. Unproduced space is a non-affirming negative phenomenon – a phenomenon that is realized by a mind that merely eliminates its negated object without realizing another positive phenomenon. Produced space is an affirmative, or positive, phenomenon – a phenomenon that is realized without the mind explicitly eliminating a negated object. More details on these two types of phenomenon can be found in *The New Heart of Wisdom* and *Ocean of Nectar*.

THE PRACTICE OF EMPTINESS IN OUR DAILY ACTIVITIES

In our daily activities, we should believe that all appearances are illusory. Although things appear to us as inherently existent we should remember that these appearances are deceptive and that in reality the things that we normally see do not exist. As mentioned earlier, in *King of Concentration Sutra* Buddha says:

A magician creates various things
Such as horses, elephants and so forth.
His creations do not actually exist;
You should know all things in the same way.

The last two lines of this verse mean that just as we know that the horses and elephants created by the magician do not exist, in the same way we should know that all the things that we normally see do not actually exist. This chapter *Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta* has extensively explained how all the things that we normally see do not exist.

When a magician creates an illusory horse, a horse appears very clearly to his mind but he knows that it is just an illusion. Indeed, the very appearance of the horse reminds him that there is no horse in front of him. In the same way, when we are very familiar with emptiness, the very fact that things appear to be inherently existent will remind us that they are not inherently existent. We should therefore recognize that whatever appears to us in our daily life is like an illusion and lacks inherent existence. In this way our wisdom will increase day by day, and our self-grasping ignorance and other delusions will naturally diminish.

Between meditation sessions we should be like an actor. When an actor plays the part of a king, he dresses, speaks and acts like a king, but he knows all the time that he is not a real king. In the same way we should live and function in the conventional world yet always remember that we ourselves, our environment and the people around us that we normally see do not exist at all.

If we think like this we shall be able to live in the conventional world without grasping at it. We shall treat it lightly, and have the flexibility of mind to respond to every situation in a constructive way. Knowing that whatever appears to our mind is mere appearance, when attractive objects appear we shall not grasp at them and develop attachment, and when unattractive objects appear we shall not grasp at them and develop aversion or anger.

In *Training the Mind in Seven Points*, Geshe Chekhawa says: ‘Think that all phenomena are like dreams.’ Some of the things we see in our dreams are beautiful and some are ugly, but they are all mere appearances to our dreaming mind. They do not exist from their own side, and are empty of inherent existence. It is the same with the objects we perceive when we are awake – they too are mere appearances to mind and lack inherent existence.

All phenomena lack inherent existence. When we look at a rainbow it appears to occupy a particular location in space, and it seems that if we searched we would be able to find where the rainbow touches the ground.

However, we know that no matter how hard we search we shall never be able to find the end of the rainbow, for as soon as we arrive at the place where we saw the rainbow touch the ground, the rainbow will have disappeared. If we do not search for it, the rainbow appears clearly; but when we look for it, it is not there. All phenomena are like this. If we do not analyze them they appear clearly, but when we search for them analytically, trying to isolate them from everything else, they are not there.

If something did exist inherently, and we investigated it by separating it from all other phenomena, we would be able to find it. However, all phenomena are like rainbows – if we search for them we shall never find them. At first we might find this idea very uncomfortable and difficult to accept, but this is quite natural. With greater familiarity we shall find this reasoning more acceptable, and eventually we shall realize that it is true.

It is important to understand that emptiness does not mean nothingness. Although things do not exist from their own side, independent of the mind, they do exist in the sense that they are understood by a valid mind. The world we experience when we are awake is similar to the world we experience when we are dreaming. We cannot say that dream things do not exist, but if we believe that they exist as more than mere appearances to the mind, existing ‘out there’, then we are mistaken, as we shall discover when we wake up.

As mentioned before, there is no greater method for experiencing peace of mind and happiness than to understand and meditate on emptiness. Since it is our self-grasping that keeps us bound to the prison of samsara and is the source of all our suffering, meditation on emptiness is the universal solution to all our problems. It is the medicine that cures all mental and physical diseases, and the nectar that bestows the everlasting happiness of nirvana and enlightenment.

A SIMPLE TRAINING IN ULTIMATE BODHICITTA

We begin by thinking:

I must attain enlightenment to benefit directly each and every living being every day. For this purpose I shall attain a direct realization of the way things really are.

With this bodhichitta motivation, we contemplate:

Normally I see my body within its parts – the hands, back and so forth – but neither the individual parts nor the collection of the parts are my body because they are the parts of my body and not the body itself. However, there is no ‘my body’ other than its parts. Through searching with wisdom for my body in this way, I realize that my body is unfindable. This is a valid reason to prove that my body that I normally see does not exist at all.

Through contemplating this point we try to perceive the mere absence of the body that we normally see. This mere absence of the body that we normally see is the emptiness of our body, and we meditate on this emptiness single-pointedly for as long as possible.

We should continually practise this contemplation and meditation, and then move to the next stage, meditation on the emptiness of our self. We should contemplate and think:

Normally I see my self within my body and mind, but neither my body, nor my mind, nor the collection of my body and mind are my self, because these are my possessions and my self is the possessor; and possessor and possessions cannot be the same. However, there is no ‘my self’ other than my body and mind. Through searching with wisdom for my self in this way, I realize that my self is unfindable. This is a valid reason to prove that my self that I normally see does not exist at all.

Through contemplating this point we try to perceive the mere absence of our self that we normally see. This mere absence of our self that we normally see is the emptiness of our self, and we meditate on this emptiness single-pointedly for as long as possible.

We should continually practise this contemplation and meditation, and then move to the next stage, meditation on the emptiness of all phenomena. We should contemplate and think:

As with my body and my self, all other phenomena are unfindable when I search for them with wisdom. This is a valid reason to prove that all phenomena that I normally see or perceive do not exist at all.

Through contemplating this point we try to perceive the mere absence of all

phenomena that we normally see or perceive. This mere absence of all phenomena that we normally see or perceive is the emptiness of all phenomena. We meditate continually on this emptiness of all phenomena with bodhichitta motivation until we are able to maintain our concentration clearly for one minute every time we meditate on it. Our concentration that has this ability is called ‘concentration of placing the mind’.

In the second stage, with the concentration of placing the mind, we meditate continually on the emptiness of all phenomena until we are able to maintain our concentration clearly for five minutes every time we meditate on it. Our concentration that has this ability is called ‘concentration of continual placement’. In the third stage, with the concentration of continual placement we meditate continually on the emptiness of all phenomena until we are able to immediately remember our object of meditation – the mere absence of all phenomena that we normally see or perceive – whenever we lose it during meditation. Our concentration that has this ability is called ‘concentration of replacement’. In the fourth stage, with the concentration of replacement we meditate continually on the emptiness of all phenomena until we are able to maintain our concentration clearly during the entire meditation session without forgetting the object of meditation. Our concentration that has this ability is called ‘concentration of close placement’. At this stage we have very stable and clear concentration focused on the emptiness of all phenomena.

Then, with the concentration of close placement, we meditate continually on the emptiness of all phenomena until finally we attain the concentration of tranquil abiding focused on emptiness, which causes us to experience special physical and mental suppleness and bliss. With this concentration of tranquil abiding we shall develop a special wisdom that realizes the emptiness of all phenomena very clearly. This wisdom is called ‘superior seeing’. Through continually meditating on the concentration of tranquil abiding associated with superior seeing, our wisdom of superior seeing will transform into the wisdom that directly realizes the emptiness of all phenomena. This direct realization of emptiness is the actual ultimate bodhichitta. The moment we attain the wisdom of ultimate bodhichitta we become a Superior Bodhisattva. As mentioned before, conventional bodhichitta is the nature of compassion and ultimate bodhichitta is the nature of wisdom. These two bodhichittas are like the two wings of a bird with which we can fly and very quickly reach the enlightened world.

In *Advice from Atisha's Heart* Atisha says:

Friends, until you attain enlightenment, the Spiritual Teacher is indispensable, therefore rely upon the holy Spiritual Guide.

We need to rely upon our Spiritual Guide until we attain enlightenment. The reason for this is very simple. The ultimate goal of human life is to attain enlightenment, and this depends upon continually receiving the special blessings of Buddha through our Spiritual Guide. Buddha attained enlightenment with the sole intention of leading all living beings along the stages of the path to enlightenment through his emanations. Who is his emanation who is leading us along the stages of the path to enlightenment? It is clearly our present Spiritual Teacher who is sincerely and correctly leading us along the paths of renunciation, bodhichitta and the correct view of emptiness by giving these teachings and showing a practical example of someone who is sincerely practising them. With this understanding we should strongly believe that our Spiritual Guide is an emanation of Buddha, and develop and maintain deep faith in him or her.

Atisha also says:

Until you realize ultimate truth, listening is indispensable, therefore listen to the instructions of the Spiritual Guide.

Even if we were mistakenly to see two moons in the sky, this mistaken appearance would remind us that in fact there are not two moons, but only one. In a similar way, if seeing inherently existent things reminds us there are no inherently existent things, this indicates that our understanding of emptiness, ultimate truth, is correct. Until our understanding of emptiness is perfect, and to prevent ourselves from falling into one of the two extremes – the extreme of existence and the extreme of non-existence – we should listen to, read and contemplate the instructions of our Spiritual Guide. A more detailed explanation of relying upon our Spiritual Guide can be found in *Joyful Path of Good Fortune*.

All the contemplations and meditations presented in this book, from *The Preciousness of our Human Life* to *A Simple Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta* should be practised in conjunction with the preliminary practices for meditation presented in *Prayers for Meditation*, which can be found in *Modern Buddhism – Volume 3: Prayers for Daily Practice*. These

preliminary practices will enable us to purify our mind, accumulate merit and receive the blessings of the enlightened beings, thus ensuring that our meditation practice is successful.



Arya Tara

Examination of our Lamrim Practice

Through practising the stages of the paths of persons of initial scope, middling scope and great scope we may have developed some experience of renunciation, bodhichitta and the correct view of emptiness, which are known as the 'three principal paths'. We should now examine ourself to see whether or not our experiences of renunciation, bodhichitta and the correct view of emptiness are qualified. Through judging our mind, if we realize that our attachment to the things of this life still remains, this is the sign that our renunciation is unqualified; if our self-cherishing that believes our own happiness and freedom are important, while neglecting others' happiness and freedom, still remains, this is the sign that our bodhichitta is unqualified; and if our self-grasping that grasps at ourself, our body and all other things that we normally see still remains, this is the sign that our understanding of emptiness is unqualified.

We therefore need to apply great effort to become deeply familiar with the trainings in renunciation, bodhichitta and the correct view of emptiness. We need to practise these trainings continually until our attachment, self-cherishing and self-grasping reduce and we are able to control these delusions. When we have accomplished this, we have 'passed our examination' and we have the 'position' of being a great Yogi or Yogini.



The nada

*(Please note that the nada should be visualized
to the size of a small pea)*